

Places Where God Comes - The Temple

John 2: 13-22
Hebrews 9: 11-14; 10: 19-25

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It was a good thing, a **really** good thing.

The temple, that is. For every Jew it was a central part of their life and identity. That's because here was the place of their connection with God. It's what made them who they were.

As much as Eden and the Fall from perfection marked one major and terrible point in human history, the point where people lost contact with God and were banished from His perfect Presence -

As bad and dark as that was, the Temple was a symbol of hope and goodness and promise of renewed life and contact with God once more.

The Temple was where the Presence of God could be found.

The Temple was where the Presence of God could be experienced.

The Temple was the place of Immanuel - the place of God among the people.

And **that's** what made it such an incredibly good thing.

The temple was a large complex right in the heart of Jerusalem.

In the outer courtyard area, Gentile converts gathered for worship. But they had to remain there. They couldn't go into the temple interior.

It was, in fact, that outer courtyard, where Jesus had the altercation with the merchants. Those religious entrepreneurs had taken over what was, in effect, the worship space of the Gentiles. They'd left the Gentiles no option but to worship amid the very distracting noises and smells of an open-air market.

The merchants were getting between these believers and God.

Jesus sees that, and goes ballistic.

What they did was **NOT** a good thing!

So - there was the outer courtyard.

Deeper into the complex was the place where Jewish worshippers would gather. A large altar was there, where sacrifices were offered in atonement for sins - sacrifices for forgiveness, setting things right, once more, with God.

Inside the building proper, was first of all a big area where the priests would do their work of prayer and offering.

Right in the very central core of the whole Temple was a sacred room called the *Most Holy Place*, or the *Holy of Holies*. Only the High Priest was allowed to go in here, and he only once a year. When he went in here, it was with a rope around his ankle so that, if God struck him down and he died, he could be pulled out without others having to enter the room.

A thick, huge curtain separated the *Most Holy Place* from the other holy section of the temple. That curtain was **never** to be parted.



In that *Most Holy Place* was a sacred box called the ark of the covenant. Two carved angel figures had their wings arched over the top of that box. That space was known as the *Mercy Seat*. God proclaimed that His Holy Presence was found there.

It was the only temple in the entire world where no idol was found. No idol was needed. God was not present through some figure representing Him. He was simply there in that special space. Unseen, but very really present. The picture on the front of the bulletin, and on the video screen, represent that Mercy Seat space.

It is the space of the Presence of God.

Holy Space.

Powerful space.

Space in the temple.

And so the temple was critical to the life of any Jew.

It was, in fact, their spiritual home.

It was their spiritual place of belonging.

It was the antidote to Eden's curse.

Every Jew valued that Temple.

And the Roman ruler of the day, King Herod, was trying to buy his way into the heart of the Jews by doing a huge rebuilding project on the temple – expanding it into something physically amazing. Work was continuing right during Jesus' day. Hence the remarks about the 46 years of construction. In fact, it wasn't even done yet.

The temple - the place where God comes.

This Advent season we remember the coming of a new Temple.
Temple taken to a whole new level.
Temple - in the sense of the Place where God comes.

As John 2 tells us, it's temple NOT in a limestone building.
This is flesh and blood temple.
It is the temple of Jesus' body.

This is where God comes;
where God dwells;
where contact with God can be found.

This is the antidote to Eden's curse - the temple of Jesus' body.
The body that was murdered on the cross.
The body that rose three days later.
The body sacrificed, which we remember through the sacred action,
the sacrament
of Holy Communion.

Everything that the old temple of wood and stone represented came together in the body and person of Jesus.
Sacrifice.
Prayer.
Worship.
The Presence of God.
Spiritual belonging.

All the business that was transacted in that ancient temple with goats and calves, with fire and ashes and blood being thrown and sprinkled,
all the walking and kneeling and bowing
all the actions of the priests
even the annual action of the high priest in the Most Holy Place
All of that came together in the body and person and life and ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Temple.
Jesus is the New Temple.
Jesus is the Presence of God.
Jesus is the Way to God.

What the wood and stone temple could only, in some vague way, point towards, Jesus fulfils.
For He, the Son of God,
came to earth from the very real Temple,
the Temple of heaven,
where God dwelt very fully and powerfully.

And it is in that heavenly sanctuary that the great transaction is made in the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood -
- the great mysterious transaction where He paid for the guilt and sin of all who would believe in Him.

Through Jesus, then, we belong to God.
Through Jesus, we can have contact with God.
Through Jesus, we can look forward to eternal life in God's Presence.
Through Jesus, that very same Holy Presence goes with us every step of our earthly journey.

Through the Temple of Jesus.

As we gather at the Lord's Table we remember that.

One more thing, though.
Perhaps some of you are thinking that the Jews had it a bit better than we did.
For at least they had something physical.

And for us, well, Jesus has gone to heaven. Nothing to see or touch.

Guess what?

Not so.

Did you notice, perhaps, in our reading from Hebrews 10 how the language shifts from talking about our being able to go to God with full confidence and assurance -

how it shifts from talk about that to talking about believers gathering together?

Did you notice that?

If you didn't, please notice it now!

Because it is crucial.

For Christians there ***still is a temple on earth.***

St. Peter talks about that in his first letter, chapter 2.

Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God.....

It's a flesh-and-blood temple, the temple that lives and moves and is spread right across the globe -

- it is the temple of the Church.

NOT the physical buildings where some church congregations happen to meet. Those are just buildings. Very special buildings, to be sure. But just buildings.

The Church is the people.

That's why, in case you were wondering, the cover of our new photo directory here at Calvin doesn't show the building. It shows the people.

Believers gathered together - that's the Temple of God.

We are the Temple of God - gathered believers here in West Ottawa.

We are the ones that Jesus talked about when he said,

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them. (Mt 18:20)

That's temple talk.

And that talk is fulfilment of Old Testament talk, Psalm 133, where the Word of God tells us that the blessing of God pours out and flows -

where?

where believers gather together in unity.

That's the place of God's blessing.

And only there.

The gathered assembly of believers.

That's temple space and time.

Holy space and time.

God space and time.

Us...

....Together

....Sharing faith and life in Jesus.

So Hebrews 10 - don't neglect meeting together.

Which is what we're doing here this morning in the middle of the Advent season of 2005. We're being the Temple of God. In this gathering the Presence of God is found and experienced.

It is to be treasured.

It is to be protected.

As much as any Jew would protect or treasure that wood and stone Temple.

Each believer here - you're a part of the Temple.

You are part of how the Presence of God flows into and is experienced by the lives of very ordinary girls and boys and women and men here in the city of Ottawa.

Please value each other and treat each other accordingly.

For this assembly is the place where God comes.
For Jesus' sake.

