

Easter 5 10 May 2020

John 14:1-14

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

'Pitch a tent in God'

A couple of years ago I decided to use some of my long service leave. I packed a tent in the back of my Hyundai and took a leisurely 10 day drive across the Nullarbor to Melbourne, with a little detour into the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. This trip was undoubtedly one of the highlights of my life.

Because I had never driven the roads before it was a journey into the unknown. One of the unknowns each day was where I would pitch my tent that night. Where would be my place of 'rest'?

The gospel reading we heard tonight talks about Jesus's journey, through death and back to life in God, using the image of a resting place. Coming close to the time when he will die there is an extensive reflection which goes over three chapters in which Jesus comforts his anxious disciples:

'Do not let your heart be troubled; have faith in God and have faith in me. In my Father's house there are many places of rest. Would I otherwise have told you that I am going to make a place ready for you?'

This is not the first time in John's gospel that Jesus has deployed this metaphor of being in God as a physical place. Way back in chapter 1, two of the disciples of John the Baptist see Jesus walking by. Jesus says to these disciples, 'who do you seek'. And they said to him, 'Rabbi' (that is, Teacher), where you are **staying**? Jesus says to them, 'Come and you will see'. So the disciples *went* and *saw* where Jesus was **staying**, and **stayed with him** that day'.

John's gospel is nearly always operating on two levels simultaneously – a historical/physical level, and a spiritual/theological level. The allusion to where Jesus is *staying*, (or *abiding*), in Chapter one, as well as in Chapter 14 which we heard tonight, is a reference to the fact that Jesus's true home is **IN GOD....IN the Father** [see also 13:3].

So when the disciples are getting anxious and worried about what is to become of Jesus when he dies, Jesus deploys this image of where he **resides**....(that is, where his **true home** is). In one of the charming older translations of the Bible it's translated as 'In my Father's house there are many mansions'. Isn't that great – not only is a *place* prepared for us in God but a '*mansion*'.

So...back to the Nullarbor Plain. Here I am sitting on the edge of the desert and I'm thinking to myself with just a bit of anxiety, 'where am I going to *abide*' tonight? Fortunately for me, like most questions in life these days, there is a phone app which can provide guidance. This phone app lists every caravan park, campsite and even remote parking bays in the country, complete with traveller reviews updated and uploaded constantly. So I could relax a bit, knowing that all I have to do is to look up the place where I am going and see what other travellers have said. Is this a good place to rest? Does it have a toilet and a hot shower?

In other words I could rely on the *witness* of other travellers even though I had never been to this place before and could not even image what it might be like.

This is rather like what happens in the Christian spiritual life - we are often being guided by previous travellers who introduce us *to the story of God*. *St Paul speaks in these terms when he says, in 1 Cor 15... 'now brothers and sisters... among the very first things, I delivered to you what I had also received'*...and then he goes on to talk about how the resurrected Jesus had appeared to all these witnesses. The church is like a bunch of travellers who are witnessing to the truth which they have received from other witnesses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, carried through the centuries....like a constantly updated phone app.

EXCEPT, in John's gospel this witnessing, so to speak, is at a whole other level. Because what John's gospel is saying is that the story starts NOT firstly with *our witness to God*, but *God's witness to us*. *God reveals God*. HOW does God do this? God the Father reveals himself in the person of Jesus.

*Philip says to Jesus, 'Lord, show us the Father'....to which Jesus replies, 'I am with you for such a long time, Philip, and you have not known me? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**'.*

Why is this important?

It's incredibly important when it comes to trust and faithfulness. The Christian invitation to *trust*, is not an invitation to trust in a god because we have a momentary spiritual high point; **or** a god who is a construction of a class in philosophy; **or** the Roman Emperor (who called himself God's Son); **or** Mars – the God of War; **or** even a hotchpotch of god images which we assemble by reading lots of spiritual texts and chucking them in the home blender and making a theological milkshake which is very good to our own personal tastes.

The reason John's gospel has Jesus saying to his disciples, in the face of death, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled' is because God has been revealed fully in the person of Jesus...and that is reliable good news. Remember that ALL of this is written from the perspective of the resurrection, looking back. When these texts were written, God's endgame had already appeared. God is transparently GOOD. I can **rest** in this place. In fact I don't even need the phone app to tell me that this is a really good place to **rest**. We know God the Father (or we could potentially say Mother because it's a relational descriptor, not a gendered descriptor), is good because the Father looks like Jesus – and Jesus looks like the Father. And, Jesus rests IN this God....and Jesus invites US to rest in this God who is good. How do we know? Because God looks like Jesus.

Bottom line? Go camping in God....pitch your tent there, just as God pitched his tent for a while in our world, to be with us, so that he might take us to an even fuller dwelling place where he is always. This God is thoroughly, and definitely a good place to rest, today and for all eternity. Amen.