**Going Home**

*Adapted from a sermon preached at St Martin-in-the-Fields on January 28th 2024 by Revd Dr Sam Wells*

Most people when they hear the word homelessness think of rough sleeping. It’s a reasonable assumption to make: there’s plenty of people near St Martin’s sleeping in shop or office doorways in makeshift sleeping bags and sometimes rickety tents. But rough sleepers represent only 10% of the homeless population of the UK. A second group of homeless people are those in night shelters, hostels, bed and breakfasts, and refuges: in other words, places you couldn’t possibly call home. Then there’s the so-called hidden homeless: those who keep out of public gaze by sleeping at a friend’s house, bedding down on a sofa, living in a squat, a car or a shed. Finally there’s those at risk of homelessness, for whom fragile finances, strained relationships or the risks within the home make each day one of uncertainty and vulnerability.

It’s very difficult to reach any kind of sustainable wellbeing without a real home. The clue’s in the name: this is not about houselessness – it’s about homelessness. Home means a host of things that house doesn’t always mean: things like warmth, relationship, comfort, peace, belonging and trust..........

The Bible has no sentimental solution to homelessness. Abraham was promised a home but always lived in a tent. Moses wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Israel spent 50 years in exile. The Old Testament is a story of homelessness. And in the New Testament we get the words, ‘Here we have no abiding city.’ Jesus is born homeless, and later says, ‘The Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’ We learn at the start of John’s gospel, Jesus was in the world, but the world received him not. It’s a commonplace to say Christianity is about salvation: but it’s often forgotten that salvation means permanent wellbeing. The Bible is one great big global wellbeing index.

Christians base their notion of home on two fundamental promises. The first is about the future: Jesus says in John 14, ‘In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. … If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.’ This is a promise that there is ultimately a home……and that it’s a place of belonging and relationship and warmth and security and trust. And it’s a promise that Jesus is there. There will be an end to all our displacement and transitoriness and we.…shall finally come home.

The second promise is about the present: in Revelation 21, we’re told, ‘Behold, God’s dwelling is among us, and God dwells with us and we are God’s people and God is with us.’ This isn’t about a final secure place: it’s about the happiness and wellbeing we can find even when we have no secure and stable place……

Because the true wonder of the Christian gospel is not just that we shall one day come home, that all our strivings shall cease, that taken from our souls will be all the strain and stress and that finally our ordered lives shall confess the beauty of God’s peace. That is marvellous and true, and our ultimate hope. But the Christian gospel is more tangible and surprising and wondrous than that. It is that God too knows what it means to be homeless, and that God chooses from before the foundation of the world to be at home with us. Wherever we are, in a shop doorway or a cosy manor house, sleeping on a London bus or crossing the Channel in a fragile boat, God’s home is with us. God’s home is made with us that our home may forever be made in God.

So those experiencing homelessness are not a separate underclass to be earmarked as a project and simply fixed by legislation and application of policy. A homeless person is an icon of each one of us, insecure, seeking trust, aching for belonging, and even more than that, a window into God, who is never at home, until making a home with us.

**Leading into the stillness**

As you came to us in Christ, making your home with us

to prepare a place for us,

we now open our hearts in the silence to receive you,

that you may dwell in our hearts by faith,

preparing us to be a hospitable place for all in search of home.

**Leading from the stillness:**

Father, hear the prayer we offer:

Not for ease that prayer shall be,

But for strength that we may ever

Live our lives courageously.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,

In our wanderings be our guide,

Through endeavour, failure, danger,

Father, be there at our side.