



## WAITAKI PRESBYTERIAN PARISH

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**November 6<sup>th</sup> 2022 Bethne Dodd**

**'The Best Dwelling Place'**

### **CALL TO WORSHIP:** (*Psalm 90 NSRV*)

O Lord,

**you have been our dwelling-place in all generations.**

Before the mountains were brought forth,

**or ever you had formed the earth and the world,**

from everlasting to everlasting

**you are God.**

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,

**so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.**

Let your work be manifest to your servants,

**and your glorious power to their children.**

Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,

**and prosper the work of our hands.**

### **PRAISE TO THE LORD** (*WOV 28*)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;

O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation;

all ye who hear, brothers and sisters draw near,

praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;

surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;

ponder anew what the Almighty can do

who with his love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is within me adore him!

all that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!

Let the amen sound from his people again:

gladly for ay we adore him.

### **OPENING PRAYERS** (*Joy Cowley 'Psalms for the Road' Page 21*)

Beginning with the words of New Zealand author Joy Cowley, we pray...

*Kia ora, my friend. Welcome.*

*You bring honour to my house and a blessing to my whanau.*

*Come in, spend time with us*

*and we will talk, You and I, of good things.*

*You know, when I was young*

*I had a picture of You in my head,*

*a young Jewish man in a long robe,*

*and that is true, my friend, that is true,  
but You grew with me over the years  
and now I know that your whakapapa  
belongs as much here, as over there or anywhere else.  
You are one of our people,  
one with these mountains, one with this land.  
Haere mai e Hehu Karaiti,  
Welcome Christ Jesus  
this is your home.*

Forgive us for misusing it –  
for mismanaging the land  
the places we call home  
the places where we dwell  
and for mistreating people whom you dwell within...  
(Pause)

In the name of Jesus, who reassures us of forgiveness,  
and restores us to new life, we pray. Amen.

**DIALOGUE:** *'The Best Dwelling Place'* (by Sister Margaret Halaska)

*Dialogue between a person and God the Father based on Revelation 3:20...*

*"Listen! I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door,  
I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me."*

*(The Father knocks at my door seeking a home for his Son)*

Person: Rent is cheap.

**God: I don't want to rent, I want to buy.**

Person: I'm not sure I want to sell, but you might come on in and look around.

**God: Thanks, I think I will.**

Person: I might let you have a room or two.

**God: I like it. I'll take the two then.**

**You might decide to give me more some day. I can wait.**

Person: I'd like to give you more, but it's a bit difficult.

You see, I need space for me.

**God: I know. But I'll wait. I like what I see.**

Person: Hmmmmm...maybe I can let you have another room.

I mean, I really don't need that much.

**God: Thanks, I'll take it. I like what I see.**

Person: I'd like to give you the whole house - but I'm not sure.

**God: Think on it, I wouldn't put you out.**

**Your house would be mine and my Son and I would live in it.**

**You'd have more space than you ever had before.**

Person: I don't understand that at all.

**God: I know, but I can't tell you all about that now.**

**You'll have to discover that for yourself.  
And that can only happen if you let him have the whole house.**

Person: A bit risky.

**God: Yes, but try me.**

Person: I'm not sure – I'll let you know.

**God: I can wait. I like what I see.**

*The Best Dwelling Place for God is within our hearts.*

**WELCOME HOME** (Shaun Groves)

Take me, make me all You want me to be  
That's all I'm asking, all I'm asking.

Welcome to this heart of mine I've buried under prideful vines  
Grown to hide the mess I've made inside me  
Come decorate, Lord  
Open up the creaking door and walk upon the dusty floor  
Scrape away the guilty stains until no sin or shame remain  
Spread Your love upon the walls and occupy the empty halls  
Until the man I am has faded no more doors are barricaded

*Come inside this heart of mine it's not my own  
Make it home  
Come and take this heart and make it all Your own  
Welcome home*

Take a seat, pull up a chair, forgive me for the disrepair  
And the souvenirs from floor to ceiling  
Gathered on my search for meaning  
Every closets filled with clutter messes yet to be discovered  
I'm overwhelmed, I understand I can't make this place all that You can  
*Come inside...*

I took the space that You placed in me  
Redecorated in shades of greed  
And I made sure every door stayed locked  
Every window blocked, and still You knocked  
*Come inside...*

Take me, make me all You want me to be  
That's all I'm asking, all I'm asking

**WELCOME, NOTICES & CELEBRATIONS**

**THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

**THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION** (WOV 385)

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord:  
she is the new creation by water and the word;

from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her, and for his life he died.

Elect from every nation yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth:  
one holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses with every grace endued.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

**1st READING** Revelation 21:1-5a (NRSV)

The new heaven and the new earth

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

### **MESSAGE PART 1: ‘The Best Dwelling Place’**

Making a house a home can be hard work. The kind of work that’s messy and time-consuming but ultimately worthwhile and satisfying, especially if done yourself. DIY (Do It Yourself) home maintenance is much to be admired. In theory, it’s great – given the right tools, time and know how. But, undertaken recklessly, it can prove to be a dangerous occupation... as ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) and no doubt some of you can attest. House painting seemed to be my parent’s particular nemesis.

My mother once fell gracefully through our cherry tree to land, back-first, draped over our patio’s metal railing, when a ladder she’d mounted - to reach an awkward corner of the house with her paintbrush - lost its footing along with her. A first aid bag of frozen peas and a precautionary x-ray later, she got off relatively unscathed.

As for my father. Perhaps the most entertaining of his incidents was due to an intrepid chimney painting exercise. Never keen on heights, he’d mustered his courage to alight the ladder in his everyday attire, much to my mother’s dismay. As she pointed out this oversight he refused to return to ground level, like any sensible human being, and instead got mum to chuck his old painting overalls up to him. I can still picture him writhing on the roof, clutching onto the chimney breast with one hand for support while worming his way into what turned out to be... *mum’s* overalls.

She was 5 foot 4, he was 6 foot 1... it was not a pretty sight! Folded in half at altitude, circulation impaired and fuming with expletives, he was determined to paint the chimney despite being clamped into a permanently crouched yoga position. We were helpless with laughter. To his dying day he swore she'd done it on purpose. She hadn't. It was just one of life's delightfully serendipitous moments.

Fast forward two decades. During an on-site discussion concerning updating the original 1950's laundry, last painted by my DIY parents, a builder reassuringly remarked, *"Your home might need some maintenance but she's a decent dwelling at heart."* Good to know.

This put me in mind of these words attributed to a 12<sup>th</sup> century German-born monk and writer, with the unlikely name Hugh of St. Victor. *"You will build a house for the Lord your God in and of yourself. He will be the craftsman, your heart the site, your thoughts the materials."* Reassuringly adding, *"Do not take fright because of your lack of skill; he who requires this of you is a skilful builder and he chooses others to be builders too."*

This, in turn, reminded me of Paul's words to fellow Christians in Corinth. After pointing out *"We are partners working together for God,"* he continues *"You are God's building (God's house). Using the gift that God gave me, I did the work of an expert builder and laid the foundation, and another is building on it. But each one must be careful how he builds. For God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid."* (1Corinthians3:9-11)

Throughout the ages - worship sites, temples and churches - have all been built and dedicated to the glory of God. But while God sometimes chooses to temporarily inhabit a man-made space or meet us within such a setting, more than often than not God dwells in mystery, far beyond what we are capable of conceiving. Thankfully this didn't stop people developing ideas about what that holy dwelling place looked like or where, in time and space, it existed.

It was later Jewish thought that regarded the heavens above us as being divided into a number of different strata or spheres, the highest of which was understandably considered to be God's dwelling place.<sup>1</sup>

While from Scripture - under meticulous instruction from God, Moses instigated the creation of a sacred tabernacle, a specially designed dwelling place for God. This Tent of the Lord's Presence, constructed and furnished by a host of skilled craftsman and artisans, proved to be God's Mobile Home. One that accompanied the Israelites throughout the desert wilderness where God's presence became their guiding cloud by day and fire by night. (Exodus Chapters 25-40)

Then, under King Solomon, came the promised construction of an established Temple in Jerusalem where God's dazzling presence chose, for a time, to reside. (1Kings Chapters 6-8 /2Chronicles Chapters 2-7)

Later, through the writings of the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord's detailed vision of a future Temple and its workings were revealed. (Ezekiel Chapters 40-48)

All these spaces, these places, though built and dedicated to house God's glory, were only temporary, transitional housing... until we reach the book of Revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible 1944 pg231*

Here we learn God will bring about something unheard of, something entirely new – new in time (*neos*) and in quality (*kainos*).

The same God, who declared through the Prophet Isaiah, “Do not cling to the events of the past, nor dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already – you can see it now!” (Isaiah 43:18&19) That same God now chooses to dwell with, and within, people. Coming to us and meeting us where we are.

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.” (Revelation 21:3)

“See, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5a)

Or, as *The Message Bible* reads, “Look, God has moved into the neighbourhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God.”

Itself an echo of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians where “God has said, ‘I will make my home with my people and live among them; I will be their God and they shall be my people.’”

But how? With a question of his own Paul reminds us, in rhetorical fashion, “Surely you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1Corinthians 3:16)

### **FOR I’M BUILDING A PEOPLE OF POWER** (Dave Richards SinSBk2/262)

*For I’m building a people of power  
and I’m making a people of praise  
That will move through this land by My Spirit  
and will glorify My precious name  
Build your church, Lord.  
Make us strong, Lord.  
Join our hearts, Lord, through Your Son.  
Make us one, Lord, in Your body, in the kingdom of Your Son. x2*

### **2<sup>nd</sup> READING** John 14:21-25 (NRSV)

#### The promise of the Holy Spirit

Jesus explains to his disciples,

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?”

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

### **MESSAGE PART 2: ‘The Best Dwelling Place’**

“In the days to come, says the Lord I will put my laws in them and write them on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:31-34) These words from the Prophet Jeremiah remind us, change is an inside job, an undertaking only accomplished through internal access.

This seems to be what Jesus is trying to explain to his first disciples in John's Gospel where he says... *"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* (John 14:23) Will actually set up residence and dwell within them, as expressed in our earlier Dialogue. This is by invitation only, as also noted in part of Paul's prayer to followers of Jesus living in Ephesus. *"I ask him (God) to strengthen you by his Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in."* (Ephesians 3:15 TMB)

At the time of Jesus' Ascension - his departure from earth and return to the Father – he reminded his disciples this meant the promised Holy Spirit would now come as a permanent Helper, Friend and Advocate to remain with them forever. To come alongside them, to teach and help them remember everything he'd told them. Pointing out, this would be in their and future followers long-term best interests, because his presence would now be personally and universally available by the Spirit, 24-7. As Jesus reassured them, and us alike, *"I am telling you the truth. It is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you."* (John 14:7)

Don't know about you but I'm glad we haven't been left to our own devices. DIY is not all it's cracked up to be – there are times we need expert help. And the appropriately named Helper - The Holy Spirit - who, in this morning's context could loosely be described as our internal home handyman and interior designer, is with us. There, not for some slap-dash quick cosmetic fix but, to make things entirely new – new in time (*neos*) and in quality (*kainos*). There to expertly seek out, assess and repair damage, to make necessary upgrades, to declutter, renew and redecorate, then maintain upkeep – a lifelong task. All this home improvement sounds pretty good, and it is, however ongoing costs are involved - continued work, time, willingness and commitment on our part. Ask anyone here, I'm sure you'd agree, it's hard work making a house a home.

I've always lived in the same house. After my parents died (not due to painting accidents by the way) despite living there I still felt the psychological need move in then gradually bring about change to make the space my own – an ongoing task. When we welcome Jesus into our hearts, when we invite him in, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. And so begins the adventure of a lifetime. The work of making us new from the inside out – new in time (*neos*) and in quality (*kainos*). A transformation brought about by the continual renewing of our minds (*Romans 12:1&2*) For it's as we allow the Holy Spirit, not simply to move in but to settle down, to fully inhabit and occupy our entire space - the house of our hearts - that a fundamental change begins to occur.

This takes time. But, over time, we gradually begin to understand and see things differently. To see as Jesus sees, love as he loves. Given even more time, that internal change begins to work its way out into the world. Eventually others will come into contact with the word made flesh, displayed through our lives, reflected in John's description of Jesus as *"The Word (who) became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood."* (John 1:14 TMB) John, who in Revelation later declared, *"Look. God has moved into the neighbourhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God."* (Revelation 21:3 TMB) As astounding as it may seem, God's dwelling place can look like us!

Sure – it's hard work making a house a home and settling into the neighbourhood of life. Thankfully we are not alone.

Paul puts it this way. *“God is building a home. He's using us all – irrespective of how we got here – in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day – a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.”* (Ephesians 2:20-22 TMB)

All of this is an ongoing, creative work of the Holy Spirit, but even The Helper doesn't do it alone. Our willing buy in and cooperation is still required. As we choose to collaborate we become partners and co-creators with God who lovingly offers us an ongoing relationship. And, as God's workmanship, (Philippians 2:12/13) our ever patient Creator promises to stick with us and see us through to completion. (Philippians 1:6)

Sure – it's a risk inviting God in. But a worthwhile one.  
Be assured, our ever patient Creator likes what he sees.  
May we be reminded, the best dwelling place for God is within our hearts.  
Amen

I share Paul's words of encouragement to the Ephesians, as written in The Message Bible. He prays for them and us alike... *“I ask him (God) to strengthen you by his Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, in the fullness of God.*

*God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.”* (Ephesians 3:15-20 TMB)

## OFFERING

Generous God, Your kindness knows no bounds. You give us all things.  
Your very Son Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Saviour.  
Your very Spirit to dwell within us, to help and guide us.  
And, like it or not, You give us one another to lean on and learn from.  
May You bless these our gifts and offerings, along with our time and talents.  
May You multiply them, so they can be put to good use in the service of others,  
in the neighbourhood of our lives and our communities. Amen.

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## PRAYERS FOR OTHERS & OURSELVES

*(Isaiah 66:1&2) The Lord says,  
Heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool,  
What kind of house then could you build for me,  
what kind of place for me to live in and what is my resting place?  
I created the whole universe – all these things are mine.  
But this is the one to whom I will look,  
to the humble and contrite in Spirit who tremble at my word.*



Lord of all creation, of challenge and invitation.  
You who hear the prayers of those who humble themselves,  
hear our prayers, both spoken and unspoken.

We uphold all for whom home is not a place of safety or sanctuary.  
The abused, unloved and neglected.  
The exploited, trapped and controlled.  
(Pause)

We think of all without adequate shelter.  
Displaced by natural disasters or the ravages of war.  
Living on the streets - under canvas, under cardboard, under stress.  
Camping out in cars, couch surfing,  
making do wherever a bed is offered.  
(Pause)

We bring to mind all who are forced to survive in substandard accommodation.  
In rentals - under-insulated, overcrowded, overpriced.  
Those endlessly waiting for transitional housing.  
Staying in garages, camping grounds or hotels.  
Those without privacy, without the chance of proper rest, without hope,  
without a permanent place to call home.  
(Pause)

We remember those living alone.  
The vulnerable, lonely or disconnected.  
Those need of support, of human contact, a listening ear.  
The widowed and orphaned.  
Others, ostracised through mental illness or addiction.  
Living with the stigma, prejudice and misunderstanding of life-changing illness.  
(Pause)

For all in need, and for those we personally know and love.  
For the government and all agencies that have the power to bring about change.  
And for the difference we can make for good, we pray.  
(Pause)

In the name of Jesus for whom the world had no room.  
Who, as a baby, was born and laid in a stable.  
Who, in life, as a man ministered itinerantly  
without a permanent place to rest his head.  
And who, in death, was laid in a borrowed tomb.  
Remind us to make space for others and room for you.  
Dwell with and within us by your Spirit we pray.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father in Heaven holy be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen**

(Reminder of invitation for further prayer following Service – Prayer Corner)

**LOVE DIVINE** (*WOV 148ii Hyfrydol*)

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art:  
visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave:  
thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be,  
let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

**THE GRACE:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.**