

Space for God

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Sanctuary: Google: A South Carolina golf resort; a record label for heavy metal and a ladies health spa in Covent Garden.

A holy place: Sanctus = Holy: “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth, Pleni sunt coeli et terra Gloria tua; Hosanna in excelsis” = “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, Heaven and Earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest.”

Every square metre of our building is used for many things but the sanctuary is set apart exclusively for worship. Holiness is at the heart of sanctuary. The heart of holiness is a healthy relationship with God.

A place of immunity in medieval law. The church was a place of safety for fugitives from justice, debtors and others. It is the root of the right of asylum. In modern times a place of shelter, of refuge and protection.

Making Space for God – Sister Meg. 1. Our outer lives.

Who do we turn to in a high or low spot? Do we phone or email a friend, visit someone for consolation and understanding or celebration and rejoicing? God longs for us to turn to him first, to involve him in all we do. Remember

Jesus looking over Jerusalem? How I long to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks The chicks are safe under the wings of their mother. mothering Sunday.

We spent time thinking how we can work through our distractions to focus on God alone. It is a real challenge in this age yet many are asking how they can find sanctuary

Search for Sanctuary

Following the TV series, “Monastery”, Abbott Christopher Jamison received thousands of letters and emails from people asking the same question “Where can we find sanctuary?” “I’m too busy. I want to stop being busy. How can I find ways of being less busy?” This is nothing new, In Victorian times Matthew Arnold wrote of a ‘strange disease of modern life: sick hurry, divided aims, heads over taxed, palsied hearts.”

Christopher Jamison says that the search for sanctuary begins with a desire for time out, peace and quiet but it soon moves to a deeper level as people encounter the holy and the tradition of refuge in God, the ultimate source of peace.

“Lord you have been our dwelling place in all generations ... you who live in the shelter of the most high, who abide in the shadow of the almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; My God in whom I trust.’”

Sister Meg suggested practical ideas of how to be still, such as breathing, posture, a special place, pictures, music, repeating a scripture passage. We might take a memory of a time when we have felt secure, safe, integrated, and use it as a stepping stone to come into the presence of the living God.

When the prodigal was feeding the pigs, at his lowest ebb, he remembered the place where he had known his best years and he was happy to return in the lowest place of all, one of his father's hired hands. At the heart of sanctuary is reconciliation with our heavenly father.

Making Space for God within

There is a challenge in seeking Sanctuary. Silence and a pattern of contemplation can be very attractive, but it leads to the challenge of obedience and discipline which are not so popular these days.

There is more. In the process of drawing close to God, we will discover the weaknesses and inadequacies within ourselves. This is also deeply unpopular these days and requires some practical humility to 'own up' to what we find.

Don't you know that your body is temple of the Holy Spirit? Ezekiel speaks of the glory of God filling the temple, but the people turned to other gods and the devices and desires of their own hearts, so the glory of God departed. The temple

became an empty derelict space. Jonathan Miller, all round genius, lives abroad but returns often. Speaking on the radio he said that in England where he most truly belongs, he finds the culture derelict and meaningless.

Ezekiel tells us that when they cleared the idols out of the temple and began to worship with pure hearts, the glory of God returned. Meg challenged us to think about the idols, obsessions, agendas, worthy activities good in themselves that can push God away from the centre of our lives.

When the prodigal returns, he is making space for his family, the farm, finding acceptance, forgiveness, love and a new sense of purpose as he learns to give his life again. So it is with us when we give our lives afresh to our heavenly father.

Making Space for God Together.

In our worship and our church family life, we build sanctuary centred on the love of God, expressed individually and corporately. Sister Meg helped us to think about the effects of a strong inner life on our surroundings and the people we meet. In a building where there is daily prayer and a weekly gathering for worship, could there be a sense of the presence of God?

Judging by the comments of visitors who come in during the week for conferences and meetings, the answer is yes. There are many comments on 'something about the building', as a 'a live connected place.'

How can we help visitors to access this felt sense of the presence of God? The banners will help people to ask questions. The window will be a powerful statement about this place. How can we help people to discover the chapel and use it more? How can we offer hospitality, spiritual guidance, knowledge of the living God, encounter with Christ, sanctuary?

Conclusion

Before we can offer sanctuary, we need to find it ourselves. It is part of what holds us together because we share our place of sanctuary in Christ. Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

We remember God's leaning towards the poor: The Vulnerable: Refugees those seeking shelter and safety; homeless, victims of violence, ex offenders, broken relationships. Stressed: Parents, children, those in work those unemployed, BB contestants; Responsible decision makers, leaders, all who manage power.

You who live in the shelter of the most high, who abide in the shadow of the almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, My God in whom I trust.

Perhaps Mothering Sunday, when we think of the sanctuary of that relationship, is a good time to reflect on how St Mary's can grow as a family and as a place of sanctuary for all who come.

At the still point, there the dance is TS Elliot.

