25 Sep 20 **1 Cor 6.19; Jn 14.23… - The Holy Spirit dwells within you**  Stowe

**I was intrigued to observe on a map the number of temples within the Stowe estate**, from Venus and ancient virtues to concord, victory and British worthies. It seems appropriate that you have been studying for a few weeks what we understand by **God’s Temple**.  You began by going back 1000 years before the birth of Jesus, to reflect on the **Temple of Solomon**. Built in Jerusalem, the heart of the Holy Land, it was to be a Holy Place where God’s glory dwelt, described by Isaiah as a house of prayer for all nations.  **God had chosen to dwell in a particular way for a particular people in a particular place** - a gift for the people of Israel yet a commission to be a blessing for others. The Prophet **Jeremiah** (Ch 7) forcefully reminded the Temple-goers that the religious life is not confined to formal religion but must be lived out: *’Do not trust in deceptive words and say “This is the Temple of the Lord...change your ways and deal justly with each, protect the stranger and the orphan’*.

**You then moved on to the time when Jesus entered the Temple.** He did two things, both of which were disruptive to comfortable religion and challenging to the religious authorities. He declared that the religious authorities had made the Temple less a house of prayer for all but rather ‘*a den of thieves’* – instead of loving mercy, acting justly and walking humbly, they were using the requirements of temple worship for commercial gain. The sorry state of Temple life had become a physical symbol of Israel falling away from God… Even more challenging, Jesus declared that **the real Temple was embodied in himself:** ‘*Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days’*.  God had chosen to dwell now not in a single place but in a person, his own son – who proclaimed himself to be **the Way the Truth and the Life** – No wonder John could write: ‘*We have beheld his glory…*

If that was not enough, **Jesus then called his disciples to be a spiritual temple**. As St Peter put it: ‘*You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*’.  **So God has chosen to dwell not just in a place, not just even in Jesus, but in all who follow Jesus**. **And it is one Temple** – in other words, we exist in comm, something that I feel you know well. And together we reveal his glory, his presence in the world.

Our readings today reinforce this message: **that the Holy spirit dwells in us**. This is **both a gift and a commission**. Let’s pause to think about what this means.

**First the gift**. St Paul’s statement is extraordinary: ‘Y*our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit*.’ The Holy Spirit, the ‘*Ruach’*, the breath of God, who creates, who brings order, who comforts and counsels, dwells within Christians. It is a gift, because Jesus gave his body on the Cross that our bodies might be filled with the Holy Spirit. We therefore don’t need a Temple of Venus, because God is love. Nor do we rely on a Temple to Ancient Virtues, laudable though they may be, because the cross of Jesus is the way to holiness. We have concord with God because of the victory of Jesus; we may learn from worthy others but he alone makes us worthy. **The Holy Spirit forms our character**, makes us more like Jesus and bestows gifts so that the church may reflect God’s love and holiness. I’m so glad that he does as this is the only way by which we can fulfil our ambitious Diocesan Vision: ‘*to be a Christ-like church for the sake of God’s world: contemplative, compassionate and courageous*’.

**And that’s the Commission**: very simply is to **offer our bodies**, our whole lives, to God. St Paul writes these wonderful words to the church in Rome: ‘*I urge you, offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God, holy and pure – this is your spiritual act of worship.’* Not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed – through the scriptures, through Christian fellowship, in our minds and how we live out our faith. Being a Christian is less about worship in words and style but the offering of our lives in his name for others.

So God has chosen to dwell in us, individually and together, his Temple on earth. **I wonder if this may be a timely reminder for some of us today**? It tells us that the pressure is off, because God first loves us, not we him. And it’s a reminder that the Holy Spirit is at work, in our lives and across our communities. As a church you have experienced a torrid time, with much suffering over some years and unwelcome publicity as a result of it. You have lost dear friends, most notably Peter a few years ago and then most recently Pat and her faithful ministry. You have worked hard to move on, with the great support of Val and each other, but it’s not easy to regroup, to gather yourselves. So let’s hear once more the comforting words of Jesus in our Gospel reading – and let the Holy Spirit stir in our hearts: ‘*My father and I make our home with you. The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit who I send in my name, will teach you all things. My peace I leave with you; my peace I give you, not as the world gives. So do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’*.

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