

## **Sermon for Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

### **Wherever we are – frontline series part 2**

#### **Luke 18: 9-14 and Genesis 28: 10-22**

I wonder where have you been this last week? Just think back to all the various places you have been . Who's been out and about in Bookham? (Show of hands.)

Who's been further afield in Surrey?

Who's been somewhere else in the UK?

And maybe even abroad?

And I wonder why you went to those places? Maybe you went for work?

Or for voluntary work?

Or maybe for pleasure, a day out, a holiday, a hobby?

Maybe you went to see family or friends?

Or maybe a medical appointment or to go shopping?

So many different places we go in a week.

I wonder if in any of those places you went this last week you were aware of God's presence? We tend to think of God being present in the special places, the holy places. – like in church, or in the beautiful countryside, but if we think about it we know that really God is present everywhere – this is his world.

This is the second of our series on thinking about our frontlines – the places we go where we can share God's love with others, in words and actions. Today we're thinking about the variety of places and how even unexpected places can be special places – places of encounter and transformation.

Jacob meets God not in any kind of holy place but in the middle of the wilderness by the side of the road. as he settles down for a night's sleep. Not a special place at all. Jacob is on the run, from his father whom he had deceived and his brother whom he had cheated out of his inheritance. Perhaps he thinks as he runs away that God has been left behind – that God will not want anything to do with him now, the he is out here in the wilderness alone.

But God surprises Jacob with a vivid dream in which God speaks to him directly, promising him a good

future, many descendants and above all that God will be with him.

‘I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’

And when Jacob wakes up he responds with – ‘Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it’. ‘This is the house of God – the gate of heaven.’

Jacob has learnt the important lesson that God is everywhere, not confined to holy buildings, and no amount of running can leave him behind. Every place can be a holy place because God is there.

We too perhaps tend to connect meeting God with particular places – such as in church, and forget that all the worlds is God’s and he is active everywhere – not just in the beautiful places but in the hospital waiting room, the supermarket, the board meeting, the school gate, the train, the bridge club .....everywhere. There has been a tendency in the church sometimes to see the world as somehow bad or evil and think of it as somewhere to escape from or to rescue people from; and so we would not expect to

find God there. But God made our world, and Jesus himself came into the world, and lived in it – walking and eating and sleeping in all kinds of places. The incarnation shows how highly God loves the world and all of us in it – so much he has joined us in the messiness of it. But we have tended to separate what we see as holy, religious stuff from the rest of everyday life – creating what’s called a sacred /secular divide. There are times and places where we expect God to speak to us and for us to meet with him, in church on Sunday, in a house group or church meeting... But do we expect to find God busy in the high street, in the tennis club, in the school staff room, at the bus stop, in our own home.... I believe that if we have our eyes and ears open we may be surprised.

God told Jacob that all the people on earth would be blessed through him and his offspring. God chose a special people to bless them so that they would be a blessing to others. As Christians we are part of that continuing family, the people of God, chosen to be a blessing to the world around us. We gather in church week by week to worship God together, to be built up, encouraged, strengthened to go out and be a blessing

to world we live in and to build the kingdom of God little by little. Jesus talked about bringing good news to the poor, freedom for captives, sight for the blind – wherever we are we can join in with this kingdom work – helping those held captive by debt or poverty, setting free those trapped by addiction or violence or illness, opening the eyes of all those we meet to the wonder of God’s love for them and the hope of eternal life for all.

So if God is everywhere – what about the places we work?

I think we have tended to think of some jobs as holier than others, more valuable to God perhaps. For Christians who are doing work teaching or caring for others we might expect them to see their job as part of their service to God. But what about if you work in a finance company, or in engineering, or fly a plane or fry burgers... do we see that work as somewhere we can serve God and our neighbours, somewhere we can be involved in God’s work. Do we expect God to be active in our workplace? What would it look like to be a blessing there to your colleagues, and your clients? Or to build God’s kingdom in that place?

And I know many of you give your time to volunteer in the church and in community –, one of the ways we live out our faith in Jesus, and it’s wonderful that it gives us so many opportunities to show God’s love and care for the people we meet – whether its running a Brownie pack or raising funds for a charity, helping at the Grange or showing people round Polesden Lacey....

Whether it’s in paid work or voluntary work, when we fight for justice, challenge inequality and discrimination, speak up for the vulnerable, help to protect our planet, befriend the lonely – we are helping to build the kingdom. It could be arguing for the cleaners to be paid a living wage, not the minimum wage; or taking time to make the new employee feel welcome; or changing to greener suppliers; or listening to the colleague or customer who has been bereaved....

And what about the other places we go– for our leisure pursuits, our hobbies and clubs –the gym, music, U3A, football, fishing - do we see that as part of our Christian life, part of our witness and service as well, or have we compartmentalised our lives? Do we

think of volunteering as the good, – the more holy stuff- but playing bowls, or learning Italian – that is nothing to do with God?

I have personally been amazed at how often God gives me opportunities to share his love and concern at the gym or in the choir; to listen, to help, to care. And to do it in Jesus name. It has made me realise how important it is that Christians don't end up giving all their time to church things, - however vital it is to keep the doors open and the show on the road, – but to be out there, active in the community, building relationships, enjoying God's wonderful world to the full - building his kingdom and being a blessing to those we meet.

This sermon series is about whole life discipleship – about how every aspect of our life – wherever we are, is part of our daily walk with God. In all the people we meet, the things we do, the places we go there are opportunities to show our love for God and our love for others. These are places where we can show our faith in our actions and maybe talk about our faith too as the opportunities arise. And we can find they are places where God is working on us too –transforming

us –and where others can be God's blessing to us. In acts of kindness, in building good relationships, we can both give and receive the love of God just about anywhere.

A quote from Bishop John V Taylor:

The mission of the church is to live the ordinary life of human beings...earning a living, bringing up a family, making friends, caring for others, studying, exploring making music and so on... Christians will try to do all these things to the glory of God. They will try to perceive what God is up to...and will seek to do it with him.

**Watch film.....**

### **Reflection**

To finish I would like us to return to those places we thought about at the beginning, the places we have been recently and reflect quietly on them.

1. Think back over the last week - was there somewhere or some moment when you were conscious of God's presence – perhaps in a special moment of some kind, or in the words or actions of

someone, a piece of music, a beautiful sight, a kind word....

Thank God for it.

2. Was there a time in the last week when God seemed very distant or even absent. When you could have done with feeling God's presence more clearly. In that difficult day at work, that long worrying wait at the hospital, that dark wet winter morning...

Remind yourself, God was there too. How might you be more aware of him next time? Why not learn and say that verse from the reading today – 'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.'

3. Think again of last week – was there someone who was a blessing to you last week – in a visit, a helpful word, a kind action? Thank God for them.

4. And was there a time in the last week when you were a blessing to someone else? Don't be afraid to acknowledge that, it's not blowing your own trumpet, just recognising the role and opportunities God gave you this last week. Thank God for opening your eyes to see how he is at work and how he invited you to join in with him.

### **Closing prayer.**

Lord of all creation,

Thank you that our everyday ordinary places matter to you and we make a difference there.

We offer to you the places where we live, work, study and play.

May we serve you and bear witness to you wherever we are this week.

And may we know your presence with us in these places,

Amen