

Sunday 18th July Polbeth Harwood linked with West Kirk of Calder

God on the move - II Samuel 7:1-14a

'In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'

When I was at Primary School, which wasn't yesterday, for a block of PE we got a new item or rather a new experience, called 'Music and Movement'. Now for someone who relish PE and being able to play netball, do athletics, 'Music and Movement' came as a complete shock!! Picture the scene – in the gym hall the entire class in our PE kits and we got this some posh lady from the BBC urging us to reach and stretch like the tallest sunflowers on our tiptoes; or, trying to shape your body into a tall tree with spreading branches or shape yourself into the letter 'R'. Can you tell I wasn't impressed with this form for PE. The idea, of course, was to get us on the move in a way as to stretch and move with the music in an artistic way. As well as this, subtly, to introduce impressionable children to lighter classical music. Still haunts me to this day.

The idea of being on the move can be a bit of a love-hate thing. Nobody likes being stuck in a rut, but we all like our familiar home-comforts around us. Having adventures and exploring new horizons is balanced by the thought that 'there's no place like home.'

In our scripture reading today, King David has established his kingdom and united it. He has brought together the warring factions amongst the tribes of Israel and seen off their enemies. He has founded a new capital city, Jerusalem. He has remembered the God of Israel. He has danced, in his excitement, at the nearness of

God. And then he remembered that the God of Israel had no permanent home, whereas he, David, lived in a palace.

What kind of a house should God live in? What woodwork and stonework, what glass and metalwork, what gold and silver and rubies and diamonds and emeralds and all the expensive beauty of the world would be fit enough for a house to house God? What fabrics and textiles would you use? Who would do the flowers?

In our own lives the question of housing is crucial. Shelter is essential to our survival as a species. The quality and safety of our homes matters. We need a roof over our heads. It is why seeing people in our streets who clearly have nowhere to live, for whatever reason, challenges us to think why, and what we might do about it, like supporting the Bethany Trust Charity or participating the annual Social Bite sleep out to make our government take note of the homelessness issue – oh and by golly that sleep-out is a cold evening to experience!

David sees God homeless, carried around in a box from place to place. Surely God should be in something grand, permanent, glorious?

God says 'no'. God is on the move. Temples will rise and fall. Synagogues and churches come and go. But God is on the move.

Every time we try to pin God down, or box God up, God is on the move. Every time we say, "This is what God is like, and this is how God will stay", God is on the move.

It's wonderful. It's frightening. It's unsettling. It's glorious.

However much we try to contain God in a box, or a building, or in stained glass windows, or church furniture, or communion cups, or pieces of music, or doctrine and practice and tradition and history and attitudes, God is on the move. I have often wondered whether that makes God absolute or relative. But it certainly makes God

impossible to pin down and define. That was attempted at Calvary on a wooden cross and afterwards in a stone tomb, and God got out of that too.

God is on the move. From the first verses of the Bible, where God is on the move over the face of the unformed world, through walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day; to the journey with Abraham through deserts to a Promised Land; to Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness out of Egypt; to Elijah in his lonely cave hearing the voice of God moving nearby in a whisper. God is on the move.

In Jesus, God keeps on moving. Journeys too and from Bethlehem at the nativity. Flight to Egypt; return to Mary's home-town Nazareth; travelling round the lakeside; walking over the waters of Galilee; up and down mountains and to lonely places; on the road to Jerusalem and into the courts of Herod and the High Priests and Pilate; through the city streets carrying a cross; into a stone tomb, and out of it again. God is on the move in Jesus.

And whenever God is on the move in Jesus, God encounters people. When God is on the move in Jesus, whether in the heart of things or out there on the fringes where nobody much goes, God in Jesus, on the move, encounters people. Usually people in need. Usually people not too sure about what they wanted or needed; usually people everyone else had walked away from, but here, on the fringes on the outskirts of life, these sheep without a shepherd encountered Jesus, God on the move. It's no surprise that one of the names given to Jesus in Matthew's story of Jesus' birth is Emmanuel, 'God with us'.

During the Covid pandemic which we are still experiencing, God is on the move and has been with us through out, journeying beside us all. We have seen Him in action in many ways.

God is on the move. God has to be on the move because God is seeking people out. God is looking for those who are tired, afraid, doubting, angry, isolated, grieving, lost. Some of those may have found their way to a Temple, but not all; some of those may have found their way to Church, but not all.

It remains one of the great opportunities, and great challenges, for all faith communities today.

Yes, we want people to come to Church, and become involved, and share in the things that we do and things that we like. Sometimes they will surprise us, and manage to make it here on a Sunday morning! But for those others, not so sure, not so interested, might it be that what we are being called to do is to find ways to get out there to them, and tell them about the things that we are doing, or better than that, invite them to something. Not with any expectations on our part, but simply being the agents of a God Who is on the move, out there in our community.

When I was on placement during my training in Edinburgh an event held in Saughton Park which I was told about. A group of churches in that area of Edinburgh put up a big tent. During the day they organised activities for children; at night-time there were events for families. Some old ideas, some new ones, it was well-attended, but for all the people inside the tent, there were many sitting outside. They were watching, they were interested, but they were not sure. Was what was going on 'for the likes of them' ? – as one lady said to one of the ministers present as she watched the coming and going. "Don't you have to be, like, a Christian, to get in?" she asked.

I wonder if the people passing this building ask the same question. Is it for the likes of them? What do you have to believe to come in? What's expected of you? What's not expected of you? In all of that I find myself asking, where is God? Where is this

God on the move in our community, amongst all of those people out there? The people who are uncertain about coming in, and finding out, just in case they're judged, or made to feel unwelcome, or something else that has built up for whatever reason in their misconceptions about a Church, and what it does, and what it is.

It is not that God isn't on the move within this Church. God is. But that same God is also on the move in our community, and within our county, and within our country. And that same God is seeking to find ways for those inside the Church to meet up with those outside the Church, to learn from each other, and to share with each other.

God sees only windows and doors through which God moves, to reach the people on both sides.

There are times when people need shelter, and sanctuary, and safe places in which to find help and hope and catch their breath. There are times when people need to gather to celebrate, or learn, or mourn, or work together for a good cause that makes the world a better place. May this continue to be such a place, where God is on the move, in our worship, in our service, in our encountering Jesus.

But there are also times when we need to go out, once more, beyond these walls. Back to family and friends. Back to neighbours and colleagues, taking with us what we have encountered here – the blessing, the love, the questions, the support, the encouragement – and find that as we go out into the world – our God – on the move – goes with us – before us – helping us bring the encounter of Jesus to the people we meet through what we say and do.

God on the move is not trapped inside this church box; God on the move is not shut outside this church box. But God is on the move, bringing about encounters, meeting

people on the edges and at the heart of things, and bringing blessing wherever He goes. To us; to everyone. It's wonderful. It's frightening. It's unsettling. It's glorious.

God on the move. Get ready to meet Him!

Amen