

## Sermon by Revd Stephen Baxter on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020

According to Charlie Watts the drummer of the Rolling Stones, says he hates leaving home...he loves what he does but he'd love to go home every night, even though apparently his wife won't allow a drumkit in the house.

Even Andy Warhol, the artist and pivotal figure in the 1970s exotic pop-art, musical, theatrical social whirl in 1970s New York loved being at home...

"I'm the type who'd be happy not going anywhere as long as I was sure I knew exactly what was happening at the places I wasn't going to. I'm the type who'd like to sit home and watch every party that I'm invited to on a monitor in my bedroom." Interesting that parties by Zoom were what Warhol was dreaming of.

Many of us having a yearning and need for the concept of home. During the lockdown I've been able to think about the care invested by birds in building nests in individualistic ways...the artistic moulded precision of the swallows' nest, the pragmatic use of guttering by starlings, the lofty, sociable network of chunky rooks' nests.

The US poet Maya Angelou observes that we have an aching for home that never leaves us...home the safe place we can go to express ourselves, voice our doubts. There's no place like home – the mantra of Dorothy in her trance as she spins back to Kansas from Oz.

Many of us are privileged to be spending somewhat more time at home than we'd ever imagined or perhaps would like to. There are many good things and advantages...many have constructively used to the time to undertake DIY projects...to enhance the individual features and comforts of home. Many of us have lists of things which should be done and against which little progress has been made. Alison is starting to emphasise the urgency of building a sound-proofed shed where I can practise guitar without impairing the quality of life of others.

Of course, we must be mindful of and pray for those for whom this time resembles a prison sentence with enforced isolation and deprivation, those for whom zoom and facetime offer little or no consolation...those in homes with fractured relationships, homes with darkness and danger...those working harder than ever and spending less time than ever in their homes, returning just to flop down in exhaustion.

For many of us I think there is a developing sense that it is not right to be spending so much time in our physical homes – there is perhaps a distinct sense of incompleteness. Wonderful new things are happening through imaginative use of technology to connect...but so much is missing and many are restless to be out in physical action...home is where we start, as TS Eliot put it.

We probably recognise that even if we are blessed with a happy, safe physical home, that doesn't satisfy fully our yearning for the concept home. Like many from the blessed county, I am more than happy to bang on ad nauseam about the joys of Yorkshire, ignoring the lifting of eyebrows and yawns...and in a sense although I'm unlikely to move back for some time or ever, Yorkshire will always provide an element of home for me. Being with family and friends provides an element of home. Our beloved church provides a key element of home. We have a new addition to the garden – a white transit van converted into a motorhome, which arrived yesterday. The boys are working to develop and customise it to make it their temporary home when they are able to drive down the Atlantic coasts of France and beyond, free to stop at a variety of surfing hotspots. Ann my dear mother-in-law is concerned that it is being designed for her to stay in when she is able to visit again.

In the final hours before his arrest, Jesus tries to assure and prepare his disciples for his departure. His glorious assurance Do not worry is the message the world needs to hear repeatedly. We often hear or say those words but without the foundation for them. The foundation – the reason we can say them with absolute meaning – is here in the gospel – in fact this is the very heart of the whole gospel ...Jesus and the Father, the creator of all, are one. Jesus is the truth, Jesus is with us and in us and we in him for ever. There is no promise that we and our loved ones will not suffer; death will come; but Jesus is with us in our suffering and with us at and beyond our death.

There is two-way home building. Jesus does not explain explicitly what life beyond death will be like, but he does provide some word pictures of our future home which can provide translation challenges...today you will be with me in paradise the thief on the cross is assured. Here, many rooms/ dwelling places can conjure up images of a country hotel or plush retirement home...the KJV's mansions is even more misleading. John Polkinghorne understands many rooms here to relate to a process of drawing closer to the presence and fullness of God. The real point is that through Jesus we know that God loves us, knows our needs and yearns for full eternal relationship with us.

Our real home is with Jesus, forever, and he dwells within us through the power of his spirit.

Our real home-building is to make room for his spirit to find dwelling space in us.

Our church building has a role in helping us do this by helping us provide time and space for encounter. We greatly look forward to St Stephen Walbrook resuming its part in God's purposes.

But wherever we are, we can work on our real home building and we can participate in the remarkable prospect of verse 12.. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

Inspired by the spirit dwelling in us, inspired by the selfless life of our patron saint Stephen, we can fully live the life of God here and now by doing his work, however small such acts of love and reconciliation may appear. And we can help the glory of God, the tangible presence of God, to break out and flash across this broken world.