

## ***This New Old House***

Text: Psalm 84

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**In a life before we knew one another . . .** I was pretty good at working with my hands. It's an aptitude I have always found life-giving. Projects that involve hand-tools and building, repairing and tinkering somehow evoke my creative passion.

And more than just passion. Back in the day a high school buddy and I started a business we called "BC Painting" under whose auspices we renewed the appearance of a good number of houses down on the Connecticut coast as our summers drifted by.

A few years later in college another friend partnered with me, this time in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and calling ourselves "Geordave Craftsmen." That actually extended full time beyond college for a year and a half. And then again, when I headed to seminary, I earned my way as "The House Doctor" in Newton Centre, Massachusetts.

So houses and renovation and making buildings pretty in small and large ways have always been more than casual interests of mine. You can understand then, that I lingered and watched in a daily way, and with particular delight as this amazingly beautiful worship space was refreshed and restored this past summer.

**And it *is* such a beautiful space . . .** as it has always been! The millwork and carved detail pop now with white enamel! The architectural splendor of our arched ceiling distinguished in blue! The breadth and width and height and length of the nave refreshed from top to bottom!

We are so lucky! Just goes to show that even holy and wonderful places need refreshing. Familiarity in a personal space like this is a wonderful thing and provides us with comfort. But it can also lead to a dullness that happens so incrementally that we miss the dirt and wear that grows in the corners.

Mally Cox-Chapman, whom some of you may know, tells an ancient story about a place in the desert where a spring bubbled free. It had been there as long as time. Travelers along the way always stopped there for the refreshment they needed. But, because the spring was difficult to find, someone came up with the thought that placing a stone to mark this oasis in the wilderness was a good idea. And so stones began to collect where the bubbling water was. Over time, those stones not only covered up the spring entirely, but it became almost impossible to even hear the gurgling water, let alone experience its refreshing power.<sup>1</sup>

Here is the truth beneath what I am saying. Sometimes, we who are so human, let our sacred spaces gather the dust and erosion of time such that the mystery gets covered up. Or at the very least, the appearance gets muted and dull and less attractive. Even more: that it becomes reflective of weariness and wear and depletion, instead of the love that we have and the joy and faith we want to convey.

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<sup>1</sup> Mally Cox-Chapman. [The Case for Heaven](#). Tide-Mark Publications, 2012, p. 193.

**Our Psalm for today . . .** has something to say about this. We heard it read from the NRSV translation as you have in your pew Bible. But hear it, too, in the more contemporary words of the Message. Hear it with fresh ears as the paint surrounding us is fresh, too.

*What a beautiful home, God!  
I've always longed to live in a place like this,  
always dreamed of a room in your house  
where I could sing for joy to God-alive!*

*And how blessed all those in whom you live,  
whose lives become the roads you travel.  
They wind through lonesome valleys, come upon brooks,  
God traveled, and at the last turn, you are in full view.*

I so appreciate the coupling of those two thoughts: it starts with the beautiful home of God replete in splendor. And then it expands to the souls and hearts in whom God lives. They blend together the place of God's home – as this space offers, with the larger presence and imminence of God in the lives that we engage beyond here.

Someone once told me that everyone needs an address for their soul - which, by the way, is my best argument for each of us having a church to call home - because we are creatures of the earth. (So let me know if you are interested!)

I do believe that. But we need ever to know as well that God's love and grace and presence and power are never limited by the constructs we impose: an address, a building, a creed, a theology. Even a room that we freshen up with paint! Still, and all the more, we each need an address and a building and a sacred place to come home to.

**So welcome home to this place . . .** where the Psalm shouts it out: "I love the habitation of your house O God, the place where your glory dwells!"

Welcome, back or for the first time, to an address that is always more than that and beyond the coordinates of any physical place.

Welcome, back or for the first time, by returning to the spring in our desert wanderings that we each experience along the way – because we all know how vital life-giving water really is when we thirst.

Welcome, back or for the first time, to this community but come knowing that, even as we love the church and this room in all of its splendor, God so loved the world and said nothing about a church.

I'm glad to be home with you again, equipping ourselves so that the love of Christ, and the Power of the Holy Spirit, and the Goodness of God might become more real in this beautiful and broken world. So may it be. Amen.

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