1 November 2026
St Georges Epsom 10am

## ANCHORING THERE

Karen and I have just returned from 3 weeks 'abroad' – wonderful trip –catching up with our son Oscar and Alicia in London, a pilgrimage through German forests, following in the footsteps of St Hildegard, and being totally awestruck by the creative genius of Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona.

Whether it's a camping holiday, or a trip abroad – leaving home always brings a fresh appreciation of what our own homes have to offer.

*But what happens to us when we have no home to come home to?*

One of the reasons for our trip was to help facilitate a leader's retreat in Warsaw with 24 Slavic church leaders – mostly Ukrainian – many of whom lived in Kiev, or were leading large refugee churches in surrounding countries like Poland.

Most spoke Ukrainian and Russian with only a smattering of English. So outside the formal sessions that were translated how did we communicate? By scrolling through the photos on our phones:

1. I was asked for photos of our two boys (now 32 and 31) – one pastor showed me a photo of his two gorgeous blond headed girls – aged around 6 and 7. In faltering English he said: "they took them but they can't take my faith."
2. Another proudly showed me a photo of his 3 month old daughter – she was born in hospital during a drone strike - no water and no power – his iPhone doubled as theatre lights.

3. Another wanted to see a photo our house in NZ. He then showed me his – a blackened hulk destroyed 4 months earlier in a drone strike.
4. Another told me the story of the black car – for a number of weeks a strange car was parked outside their church – and an unfamiliar man was seen taking photos of their church. A few days later a drone dropped a bomb – it missed the church but hit the carpark. Knowing a second attack was likely – rather than cowering in fear – they organised a youth worship service for the following week – over 1,000 young people turned up to worship and claim the city for God.
5. They told me they start their day not with a coffee, or scrolling the news but by checking Whatsapp to see who died overnight. There was a show of hands - all of them have lost family, congregational members and friends.

**… and none of them expect the war to end anytime soon.**

As the week wore on, I began to build a picture of what life is like on the front line. Because the drones are increasingly targeting schools, hospitals, and play centres, the parents cannot be sure when they drop their children off in the morning if they will ever see them again. Just this Friday a drone targeted a train station killing 14. It barely registered in the news. In the early days of the war, every time a siren sounded they rushed to the shelters – now the sirens ring through the day and night and they no longer bother.

And yet when it comes to their churches – they are planning for revival. They hold to the promises of God that he will remember them, and that justice is coming not as 'a lovely thought' as we might in the West, but as an irrevocable covenant with Jesus himself

But it is hard – many have been forced to flee, leaving elderly parents, pets, jobs, gardens and community behind. They all dream of home - the food, the light, the camaraderie, the everyday routines of going to the bakery to get fresh bread, the morning espresso – yet they know they will not return – for the sake of their children they must build new lives away from the home they dream of every day.

Their experiences remind me of Psalm 137 - the residents of Jerusalem taken into captivity against their will into exile – many had been killed, remembering the temple,

*"How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"*

Over these past few weeks we've been exploring this lovely, evocative, grounding word – 'home'.

**Josh** began by inviting us to come home to the heart of worship, to those practices that slowly reshape what we love and help us to orient our lives towards God.

**Jeremy** then took us to the places where we live and drawing on Jeremiah, which we read again today, the encouragement to build houses, plant gardens, love your neighbours, and to seek the good of the place where you find yourself. To live within the tension of putting down deep roots, even while holding them lightly.

And last week **Josh** took us to the furthest horizon of homecoming, asking how we prepare for our final going home. And perhaps surprisingly, his answer brought us straight back to the present: we prepare for that home by learning to abide in God right here, right now.

Through the series my sense of home has been growing larger with every week:

- Home is worship.
- Home is this place and these people.
- Home is learning to fully inhabit the life we've actually been given.
- And beneath it all is the deepest home of all: making our home in the God who has already made his home with us.

This morning I want to reprise those themes - when circumstances leaves us feeling homeless – estranged from our place, our community and maybe even from God.

- Those times when we sensed God was saying "Go there" – and yet we end up here
- When God says "Do this" and yet we end up doing that
- When all our dreams lie shattered on the floor and it feels like God just left the building

Martin Luther King delivered arguably the most famous speech of the 20th century "I have a dream". A few years earlier he delivered a lesser known, but just as powerful sermon entitled 'Shattered Dreams' in which he says:

*Shattered dreams! Blasted Hopes! This is life!*

Or more prosaically, in the words of the well-known theologian – Mike Tyson

*Everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face!*

Like many of us, I have known a few punches to the face, when good plans curdled. Each time I got punched, getting up off the floor got harder, for I knew what lay ahead. While the bruising subsided, the scars remained.

Such situations beg two questions:

- How do we make sense of what God is doing?
- How then shall we live?

I think some of the answers lie in today's gospel reading – the story of the 12 disciples who set out on a boat with a clear command from Jesus to "Go there" and ended up 'over here' with Jesus in their boat.

## Mark 6:45 -54 The storm at sea

- Jesus and the disciples are exhausted – demands of ministry, loss of John Baptist, constant crowds – all wanting something – Jesus takes them off by themselves, imagine how they must have felt when see huge crowd assembling.
- Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes
- Feeding takes place "near Bethsaida"
- *Immediately* Jesus commands the disciples *'Go to Bethsaida'* - direct command – could not have been clearer, – go to Bethsaida and go there now, he wants them out of the scene and fast – direct word from God, clear destination and timeframe – the guidance never gets any clearer than this. (NB Bethsaida city just northeast of where the Jordan River flowed into the Sea of Galilee)
- And why the urgency – Mark is silent on this, but John provides an explanation – the crowd wanted to make him king - perhaps because he is fearful the disciples will join in the chorus to make him king – nationalistic outburst.
- Long and demanding day and it is already late, but they set out obedient to Jesus' command
- But the *winds were against them*, as they headed up the Lake, so much so they pull down the sail and resort to rowing into the ferocious winds. (NB Sea of Galilee is 212m below sea level – results in sudden windstorms and down drafts)

- Despite their best efforts, and remember some of them were skilled sailors, the wind blows them off course and away from Bethsaida towards the other side of the lake.
- Obedient to Jesus command they row even harder, all through the night.
- Now well-off course, on the 4th watch, (sometime between 3am- 6am) after 9 hours rowing Jesus notices them, rises from prayer and nonchalantly walks on water to join them.
- Far from being thrilled at the sight of Jesus, the disciples are fearful, convinced they have seen a ghost (often a portent of death to a sailor, or an evil spirit)
- Jesus climbs in the boat, the winds settle, and they end up anchoring at Gennesaret - long way from Bethsaida, where immediately great ministry begins.

So, what can we learn from this story that answers those two questions:

- How do I make sense of what God is doing?
- How then shall I live?

**How do I make sense of what God is doing?**

It doesn't make sense – Jesus joins the boat, stills the storm and we expect the next verse to read – "and a gentle wind blew the disciples across the Lake to Bethsaida where they ate the fish they had caught along the way"

Except it doesn't. It's as if Jesus is complicit – they end up in Gennesaret – opposite side of the lake – with Jesus in the boat.

**God is mysterious**:

- He is not an algorithm. He is free. But he is consistent with himself. He is never fickle or pernicious.

- It's why the Christian walk is a journey of faith and not a journey of google maps
- Pete Gregg (Prayer 24/7) –commenting on the challenge of unanswered prayer, is convinced the first 100 years he spends in heaven will be characterised by:

  *"Oh … now I see"*
- For life on earth is but a chapter in a story that may well have preceded our birth and will most certainly continue. So just as in a story – each chapter moves the story on, builds on earlier chapters - I suspect we are still in the early chapters of our own story with God.

**God is present – he may be mysterious, but he is also actively present**

- Ultimately, he joins them in the boat
- Prior to joining the disciples in the boat Jesus went off to pray – he would have been experiencing the same storm they endured. He would probably have seen them on the lake. We can be sure he was praying for them

**The 4th watch -** he delayed his arrival deliberately

The disciples experienced an intensive 3-year boot camp – constantly being challenged. What the disciples saw as a destination (Bethsaida) – Jesus saw as a journey in faithfulness. He needed them to endure the storm for the far more challenging storms that lay ahead.

We see the fruit of their three-year boot camp in the years following Jesus' ascension where 11 young fickle, uncomprehending men are transformed into people of moral courage, conviction and insight

## How then shall we live, what is our posture?

They anchored there – act of will drop anchor. Feeling homeless, it is so tempting to live a life of regret – to wish for what once was, rather than settling right here, putting down deep roots – planting crops, marrying, raising children, praying for the welfare of where you have been placed (Jeremiah 29)

## Conclusion

To sum up the sermon series - **Home** is ultimately not simply the place we came from, the place where we live, or the place we one day hope to go. Home is learning to dwell in God: worshipping God, inhabiting faithfully the place where God has put us, and discovering that the life we have with God now is the life that carries us beyond death.

Ironically as our faith grows, so does our sense of displacement grows. We are all sojourners in a foreign land. We are displaced. This is not as good as it gets. Yet we are called to fully inhabit where we have been placed.

It is a demanding discipleship – Jeremy referred to it as living in the tension of making deep roots at the same time as we hold things lightly. It is a discipleship characterised by a responsiveness to pick up our backpack and go to wherever God calls us, whenever he calls us, to whatever he calls us to and to whomever he calls us to serve. (Luke 9:57 passage).

And what did spending time with those Ukrainian Pastors teach me: the homeless talked to me about homecoming – the very themes we have been exploring

> Turn up to worship.
> Inhabit the place you've been given.

Live this life rather than anxiously waiting for another one.
Abide in God here and now.

Leave the rest to God's providence, knowing that Jesus is with them in their boat, and one day, perhaps not in their lifetimes there will be no more wars, peace will come, there will be no more tears.

And what was I able to leave with them?

That they were not forgotten.

That every week for the nearing five years, churches in NZ, including my own have been praying for peace in Ukraine.

Many of them cried when I told them that.

Amen.