

2026-08-23 ... 6.30pm Evensong Service Sermon

2 Kings 6: 8-23; Acts 17: 15-34

If this evening was a bible study rather than just me talking then perhaps one of the questions we might discuss would be where we perceive God to be.

In our Old Testament reading – and just as a comment as we're passing, what a tactic to deal with your enemies – blind them, lead them astray, feed them a top-class banquet and send them home – it worked, at least for a while! ... but back to the point, we see that Elisha was surrounded by a **'mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around him'**, invisible to all but him.

Not God but God's heavenly forces.

I remember many years ago enjoying some American Christian novels where the God people went about their business guarded by angels who were sat on their car roofs. An image you can tell that has stuck with me even though the content of the stories has been long forgotten. It's appealing isn't it – but I'm not convinced that that is how God works although it is probably passages like this one from 2 Kings that gave the novelists the idea.

The middle of the New Testament reading is probably familiar to you – although you regular Evensongers will of course have heard it three years ago and three years before that in its entirety! – the middle bit about the Altar to the Unknown god is part of the morning repertoire as well.

In v24 Paul says **'he who is Lord... does not live in shrines made by human hands'**. I guess a church is like a shrine ... so when we come here to worship we do that because this is a convenient meeting place, one embellished over the centuries to make the space one where one can learn about God, and not because our God lives here rather than in the park or in your house. Of course, we might expect to meet God here, because Jesus said 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them'.

In v 27 Paul says 'he made all nations so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us' ... **'grobe'** – what an interesting word! I enjoy hearing artists talk about their work, and the making of their work, and I feel that this is how some would describe their picture making – they're looking to find the image that they imagine and it might take many layers of paint, they might paint over something and realise later that they had destroyed something important without realising it. 'Groping' implies an uncertainty, perhaps a floundering about.

There's also something about groping being something you do in the dark – particularly appropriate when Jesus said **'I am the light of the world'**.

And, still in that verse, **'God is not far from each one of us'** – doesn't that send a shiver down your spine – not a scared shiver but a shiver of wonder – God is so close – not far away on a cloud, but close enough for there to be an electricity between us and God.

Verse 28 Paul says **'in him we live and move and have our being'** - that could be like being in a bubble of God, a permeable bubble ... it sounds like lovers ... I'm almost disappointed that the development of this thought is that we are his offspring. But this takes us back to the first images of our relationship with God in **Genesis chapter 1** that humanity was made by God in God's own image. I was recently thrilled to see my mum in a look my two year old granddaughter gave me, and in my teenaged niece in a brief look and movement that I hadn't seen before. Those looks not only took away

the years of absence, but gave me a glimpse of how my teenaged mum might have looked, something of course I have no memory of. **PTO**

It seems that Paul might have held his audience's attention through these words but then lost them when he talked about the resurrection of the dead which they found ridiculous.

For those of us who call ourselves Christian, the resurrection is an important, nay crucial, part of the story, but one shrouded in a fair amount of mystery I think it's fair to say. And I'm sure it is still a stumbling block for some.

In the context of where we perceive God to be though – where does it take us?

God's not dead, he is alive! Perhaps not alive as you and I are though? – I hope you heard that I put a question mark there!

For me the image of the Spirit enables me to imagine an experience of God close to me. I have a sense too of God within me.

Where is God for you? Close enough I hope to be a comfort, close enough for you to feel an at-oneness with God in all created things, close enough for you to be able to whisper your fears and confessions and to hear the whisper of grace and mercy back.

Perhaps even more important than this close personal relationship is the effect that such closeness might have on our relationships with others – if God is that close to me, that close to you, and that close to all those '**created to seek God**', as we live in our communities, infused each of us by God's nearness, how can that not affect how we relate to each other.

Amen