

# “Better is One Day in Your Courts”

August 26th, 2018  
Psalm 84

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*Where can we find God? Only in a sanctuary, like a church?  
Nancy found God on a golf course, and God found Roberto in jail. Read on ...*

Have you heard the expression “A bad day of golfing is better than a good day at work”? You can make the expression fit your situation — maybe for you it’s a bad day out on the water, or ‘a bad day at the beach is better than a good day at work!’ Some things in life are so good that even when they’re bad, they’re good! That’s how the person who wrote Psalm 84 felt about being in the house of the Lord.

*“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord.”* Later on in the psalm he says that ‘one day in God’s house is better than a thousand days anywhere else’. One day in God’s house is better than 1,000 days on a Cruise Ship or at Buckingham Palace or anywhere else in the world you can imagine! That’s how good it is to be in God’s house. The guy who wrote the psalm would rather hang out outside the door of God’s house than live inside palaces where God is not present.

So where is this place? Where is the house of the Lord? Is God’s house the temple or the church? Partly. Though I can’t imagine too many of you saying that a bad day in church is better than a good day on the golf course.

In our scripture reading we heard the prayer of dedication for Solomon’s temple. It was built around 960 BC, and it was quite the temple. Here’s a description of the temple:

*“Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold, then he drew chains of gold across, in front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. Next he overlaid the whole house with gold, in order that the whole house might be perfect” (I Kings 6:21-22).*

*“Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of the Lord: the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of the Presence, the lampstands of pure gold... the cups, snuffers, basins, dishes for incense, and firepans, of pure gold; the hinges for the doors of the innermost part of the house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the nave of the temple, of gold” (I Kings 7:48-50).*

You get the picture: this place was gold, gold and more gold. No expense was spared, it was beautiful, it was awe-inspiring. It was the kind of place people would come to marvel at from distant countries.

So we can understand that the people loved their temple. Our church doesn't quite compare to Solomon's temple, though it is beautiful and I know many who love this church dearly. I visit from time to time an elderly woman who is shut in. She hasn't been able to come to church in a few years, and yet every time I visit she talks about how much she loves her church. One of the things she misses most about not being able to get out much is her church. She'll say to me several times in the visit "O Pastor Kim, Wall Street Church!" and then her eyes mist up. She had been coming to this church Sunday after Sunday for almost all of her life and she misses it so very much.

Now clearly it is not just about the building; I'm sure it is more about what she experienced while she was attending: maybe peace and rest in a busy week, maybe a sense of the presence of God. I'm not sure she can really articulate her feelings: they are strong feelings of love for this particular house of God.

*How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord.* The person who wrote that psalm was thinking of the temple when he wrote it, but the psalmist's feelings went much deeper than just thinking that it was a nice-looking building with great hinges: *he was talking about how incredible it is to feel so close to God that you know you are in the same house. He was talking about the presence of God.*

Solomon didn't need to build the temple for God to live in, and he knew that. As hard as he tried to make the temple beautiful and awesome, he knew at a certain level that it was totally ridiculous.

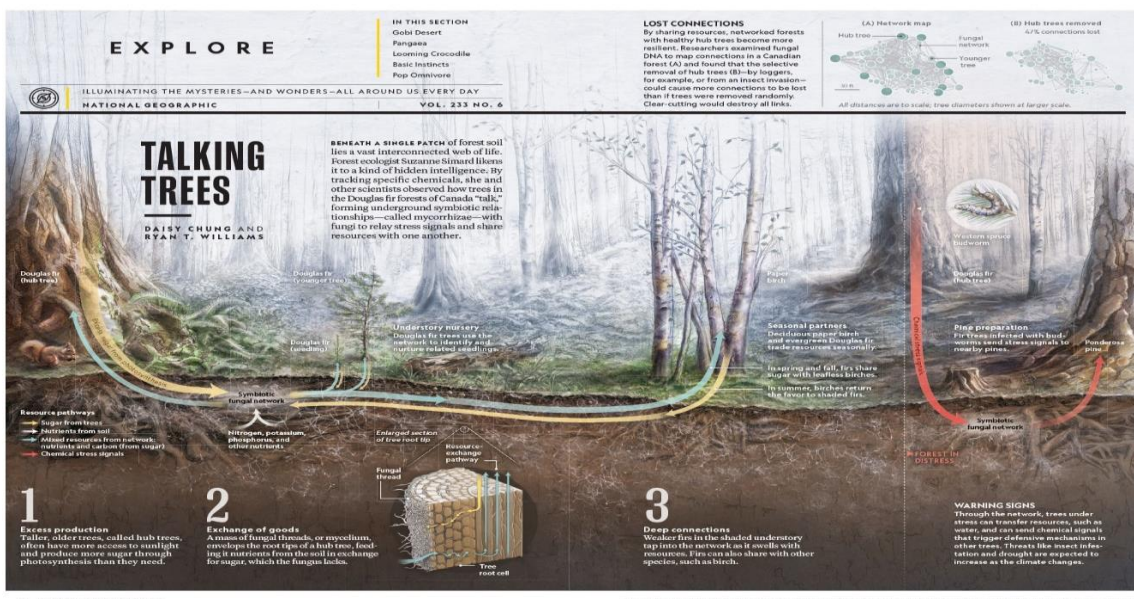
In verse 1 Kings 8:27 Solomon says: "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!*"

This is the ultimate truth: no building, no temple, no church, no place no matter how grand can ever contain God. You can find God in places; you can find God in churches. Often where we experience God is in nature, or at a special event like the birth of a child. There are thin physical places and spaces where I believe you are more likely to feel the presence of God. Sometimes these are places you'd expect, and sometimes they are totally unexpected places. You can most certainly find God in places, in containers, but you can never contain God. Can you hear the difference? You might well experience the presence of God here, but you can't catch

God like a butterfly and hold God captive in this place. Whenever a church or a religion feels that they have it all, that they are better than all the others ... at that very moment I think the presence of God slips away.

Like trapped water, the Spirit of God becomes stagnant and lifeless when we make attempts to contain or control it.

As Christians we believe the presence of God was most fully found in the person of Jesus. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, through Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the people of God—the Church. So too we believe the presence of God is experienced primarily when the people who follow Jesus come together. I can't tell you how that exactly works; I can only tell you it does.



Scientists have discovered that trees talk to each other. They communicate through the roots and fungus systems underground; sharing resources and sending warning signals to other trees. It's mind-blowing but also strangely makes sense that the forest really is connected and alive in that way. In just as logical (but also mind-blowing) a way, there is something about us 'coming together' to follow Jesus and sharing the transforming love of God to make a difference in the world that gives full expression to the Presence of God. That thing that the Psalmist so desperately longed for is found flowing through you and through me.

What difference does it make being connected to the Presence of God? The Psalmist talks about going *from strength to strength*. He also talks about making the Valley of Baca a place of springs. We don't really

know what the valley of Baca was, but you get the impression that it's normally a dry, arid place. Refreshment, hope, and new energy spring from within us when we have experienced the presence of God.

Two people who are worshipping here with us this morning are going to share with us their experiences of being transformed by the presence of God. *(At this point Nancy Nicholson came forward to share a short story about herself and then after her Roberto Cavallero came forward and shared his)*

### **Testimony of Nancy Nicholson**

Twenty-three years ago, this past July, I was a prominent business law partner and community leader in Windsor. I was busy, being busy. All that ended in a car crash in August of 1995 when I sustained a brain injury: I lost everything. I lost me. My left brain engaged in a valiant fight to reassert itself and its prior life, but it could not win: that life was over. I had been defined by doing, instead of being: Isolated, alone, depressed, unable to cope with everyday life, I entered a dark night of the soul.

The couldn'ts in my life were driving me crazy. I had no control. I had no me. Walking my dog was the only thing that seemed to maintain any sense of normalcy in my life. On one such walk, in my frustration, I looked to the heavens and surrendered. After surrendering my will to that greater than mine, things slowly improved.

Shortly thereafter, to raise my spirits, a friend invited me to attempt a few rounds of golf. It was fall, the smell of fall was in the air, and as I stood on the tee, geese rose up in formation ... I could hear and almost feel a breeze from the wings of the geese. As I took in this moment, I thought of the lines from Luke 12:

*“Consider the lilies how they grow; They toil not, they spin not. And yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass which is the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you— O ye of little faith!*

In that moment, I felt a comfort I have never sensed before. I did not have to be defined by anything. I was content to be. I, like the lilies, am equal in God's eyes. God does not need me to do or prove anything, I can just be. I knew then things were going to be fine. There were many bumpy years after that, but recalling that moment, this scripture and the Serenity Prayer has brought me comfort and let me continue to carry through difficult times.

My journey continued when I relocated to Brockville and my sister brought me back to the Church of my youth and young adulthood. I had drifted away, but Beth brought me back. Beth says you need church to feed

your spirit and she is right. After years of rehab and considerable soul searching, I have come out of a dark hole and I realized that the brain injury was the best thing that ever happened to me. I am no longer busy being busy, I am busy being. I thank Beth, the man who ran into me that day in August, this church and God.

### **Testimony of Roberto Cavellaro**

Thank you, Pastor Kim, for this privilege to express my gratitude for what God and Jesus did for me.

You would not have wanted to know me 10, 20 years ago — I was a bad boy. One day I ended up in jail — I cried, I screamed my distress to God — and He answered me!! I was so far away from His will ... this revelation of His love for me was so great that it changed me totally, completely— just like that! *In one day, I was a different person.*

Today, every morning, I surrender to Him, in order to be in contact and in harmony with His will for me.

Sometimes we think that God's not there, but He's always there. What I wish for each one of us in this church, for everyone who is longing for God, is to surrender. You cannot do this just one day a week. Just because you come to church on a Sunday morning does not mean "I'm saved & everything is OK!" It's something we need to nourish every day, this relationship with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit.

There is hope for everybody. Some people think that they don't deserve God's love, God's forgiveness, God's peace ... but that's because we can't even comprehend how great is God's love for us! I just wish for everyone a very close, very sincere relationship with Him, day in, day out. God bless you all!

God's presence has made a difference to me too. And there is a place for you. *Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of Hosts. (Psalm 84:3)*

Probably in Solomon's beautiful temple there are open spaces where birds fly in and out. It is the Middle East after all, and the air conditioning in the temple consists of open windows. But I like that it talks about the sparrows and swallows. These are incredibly ordinary, common, boring birds. Amidst all of the gold and precious stones, those plain birds have a place in God's house — a special place, at the altar— that's the heart of the temple. If those birds have a place in God's house, how much more do you have a place? There is a place for you to grow and transform into the person you were created to be, so that you might be part of that Presence .

. . so that you along with your sisters and brothers in the church might offer that place of refuge and sanctuary for others and go out and bring God's transforming love to a broken world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.