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Dear Friends,

***Home sweet home***

*Those who love me will keep my word,  
and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them*

Who of us, I wonder, has not at some point in their lives longed for a place to call home? We talk about moving house or buying a flat, or we say we need to downsize or need more space but what we really mean is we want a place where we will feel at home either alone or with others. Only days ago a new family moved into a house opposite Christ Church; I hope and pray that they will be happy there. On the night before he dies John's Jesus teaches his closest friends that they will be at home in him saying, "I go to prepare a place for you....Do not let your hearts be troubled....In my Father's house are many dwelling places." Just as Jesus' friends are about to lose their "home" with him through his brutal murder and ascension he tells them there is still a place for them that even the powers of death and violence cannot destroy. He also tells them that "those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." The death of Jesus is not the end; it marks his new life as he and his Father return to make their home in those who keep his commandments. These words are gifted to us as we move towards Ascension and Pentecost.

I have moved many times in my life but there remains only one place, Little Manor that feels like my "real" home; a photo of the house sits in our dining room. To look at it is to conjure up a thousand memories of my childhood in Epsom. As I gaze at each window of the house, its bedrooms and dining room, its lounge and its kitchen, moments of joy and sorrow, moments of struggle and pain, along with a mostly carefree childhood come to mind. Following our marriage, Billy and I moved to Norwich and then on to Bookham, Ashted, Epsom, Farnham, Long Ditton, Royal Wootton Bassett, Pendoylan and now



Little Manor

Radyr. In each place we have tried to create a home for ourselves and our family. The walls of my study track another journey and another home coming. This is the story of my spiritual journey and it moves from the places where I was baptised, married and confirmed through the churches where we have worshipped and I have served God's people.



St Martins' where Vicki was baptised



St Thomas on the Bourne,  
where Vicki was a Curate



Guildford Cathedral where  
Vicki was ordained deacon and  
priest

The mystery of God's love and God's homecoming and journeying speaks of both the individual and the wider world. In Jesus, God made his home in a real person, in a real place at a particular time in history. Even today God comes to make his home in us ...that is incarnation, the story of Emmanuel, but it is also the story of our lives. Each of us is loved individually, not because we are particularly good or gorgeous, but because God's love is universal - and this means that others who are not at all like us are loved too. In some faltering way our churches try to be a sacramental sign in our communities expressing God's deep love for the individual and his undying love for the world. God makes himself at home in our houses and flats, in our parish and in our churches when there is a space and a welcome for everyone. Now and again people tell us they don't feel good enough to go to church, but take a look at the genealogy of Jesus or the well known characters in the bible and you will discover that like you and I they too are far from perfect.

The church is a place where sinners and strangers gather and, over time, sometimes become friends. The word parish comes from the Greek *paroikeis*, which means a visitor or stranger. On the road to Emmaus two friends ask the risen Lord "are you the only one who doesn't know the things that have taken place?" This strangers/friends paradox was most clearly seen in the early church when the peace was not an embarrassed shaking of hands or hug but a kiss on the lips. Pagans were scandalised not just because one or two got carried away in the moment but because strangers seemed to love each other.

Once upon a time, and you see this clearly in other parts of the world today, churches had a hostel for foreign visitors. How does it make sense to receive Christ in the Eucharist and reject him in person? Our churches have the ability to reveal and conceal Christ. In my last parish in Guildford Diocese on my second Sunday an almighty argument broke out between "the ladies of the kitchen" culminating in one giving notice that she would no longer help with the Sunday lunches. In my final weeks a young couple preparing for marriage asked me, "do the ladies who serve coffee always squabble?" I now wonder if they returned or fled from that church after their wedding? God's promise to make his home in us and among us is sealed on the cross in blood, sweat and tears. Yet in his seeming abandonment at the foot of the cross those who were promised a home with him scatter and betray him. Oh yes, ladies of the kitchen, of whom I am sometimes one, it was ever thus. And yet despite our lack of love there's no getting away from the God who travelled with his people in fire and cloud towards the Promised Land. This God, whom Elijah fled from and who he heard not in the storms but in the whisper of silence, comes to us when we are least expecting it.

Days ago, following the death of Sheila Gompertz a beloved, wife, mother and grandmother, her husband David suggested his family should place a yellow ribbon outside to signify their grief. Hannah, a grandchild, reminded him they couldn't go out to buy ribbon so together with her sister Becky they suggested colouring a yellow heart and placing it in their window. Hannah and Becky also opened a Facebook page where others can post their own windows with yellow hearts to remember loved ones who have also died from Covid-19. David speaks about this being a place where the general public can find a "home in their grieving" and Sheila's granddaughters, who remember their grandmother's giggles and beautiful personality realise their idea will help others see those who have died as individuals rather than statistics. At a time when the church is struggling to support the bereaved through a minimalistic funeral ministry I applaud this family's thoughtfulness and creativity and I encourage you to put a yellow heart in your window if you have lost a loved one - thus enabling you to express your loss and us to surround you with our prayers and love.

On Thursday we will celebrate Ascension Day (I will be posting a YouTube Compline service in the evening for those who wish to join me), that moment in time when Jesus' closest friends realised they would never see Jesus of Nazareth walking the earth again - but very quickly they came to realise that the ministry he had begun was theirs to keep alive. Even as the early church was being persecuted, the followers of Jesus came to sense that Christ had come to dwell here in the many mansions of their own hearts and the hearts of strangers. They also came to know that his death was necessary so that his work could grow and multiply.

Finally, before I sign off for another week may I express my thanks to all of you for what you are doing to keep the rumour of God alive? The bags of food and toiletries delivered to The Rectory have been gratefully received by needy local families...Thank you and do please keep giving. The phone calls and messages to ask me how I and the family are coping are always much appreciated. The deliveries of food and necessities that you are making to those who are isolating are gratefully received. Your clapping for NHS and key workers lifts their spirits and your prayers for others are changing the world. And this is what John is trying to explain in Jesus' final discourse the night before he dies - when he tells us he's in us and with us when we continue the work begun in Galilee over two thousand years ago.

With love  
Vicki  
X

PS ...as mentioned in recent mailings do please help us to keep our church financially secure for the enjoyment of this and future generations by giving regularly. Do join the Giving for Life Scheme, or put money aside in a jar or envelope each week. From next Sunday you will be able to press the giving button on our website just as you might place a donation in the offertory plate each week.



A painting by a member of St Mary's, Long Ditton, Vicki's first incumbency. Can you spot her?