

Coach House Church BEACONS

GOD IN A BOX

18TH JUNE 2020

If I stand on the shoreline in Anglesey and look out to sea, then I can see a blue marker buoy in the middle distance, and a lighthouse on the rocks towards the horizon. From where I look, the blue buoy looks like small triangular shape and it also looks like I could kayak over to it easily. The lighthouse looks to be just behind it, and maybe that's not so far out of reach, maybe on flat water on a still, sunny day, I could paddle over and enjoy the scenery.

However, the distance is very much an illusion, as when I look at a map: the buoy is actually 1.5 miles away with the lighthouse a further 5 miles away. So, that's an expedition I won't be tackling on my kayak!

I once agreed to go on a rollercoaster. This is only surprising when you realise how I don't like heights at all. Well it didn't look so scary from where I was standing and I convinced myself that it was all mind over matter. However, when I actually started going up, not even half way up, then I realised how high it was and didn't want to be there at all. For the rest of the ride I closed my eyes and shrieked, telling myself that I must not do this ever again. Forget mind over matter! The point of these two descriptions is to illustrate that the concepts of 'near and far' rather depend on your perspective, from the angle you are looking at something.

I also think that the concepts of near and far have got rather mixed up at the moment. No wonder we are feeling weary and want 'normal' back again. If your contact with someone is through a window then, the distance is only cm but may as well be metres. We understand the reasons why but we also realise that this is not how life is meant to be.

God's plan from the beginning of time was to be near, to be close to his creation. Genesis says that in the cool of the day, Adam walked with God. However, this closeness was broken by sin and God closed the entrance to the beautiful garden of Eden. The closeness of God was now not possible.

Back in the Old Testament, God established and instructed the people of Israel to build a tabernacle, a tent, a meeting place where the presence of God could live on the earth, so that closeness could be re-established. God presented himself within the most sacred area of the temple, the Holy of Holies.

Exodus 25 describes the precise instructions and dimensions of the ark of the covenant where God's presence would be found.

17 "Then make the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—from pure gold. It must be 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. 18 Then make two cherubim from hammered gold, and place them on the two ends of the atonement cover. 19 Mold the cherubim on each end of the atonement cover, making it all of one piece of gold. 20 The cherubim will face each other and look down on the atonement cover. With their wings spread above it, they will protect it. 21 Place inside the Ark the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you. Then put the atonement cover on top of the Ark. 22 I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel.

Moses himself experienced the presence of God on Mount Sinai, when he was given the tablets with the commandments inscribed on them.

Moses was bold and asked God, in Exodus 33:18

18 ..."Then show me your glorious presence."... And in verse 21 God replied...

21 The Lord continued, "Look, stand near me on this rock. 22 As my glorious presence passes by, I will hide you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and let you see me from behind. But my face will not be seen."

Moses couldn't look at God directly and furthermore, the Israelites waiting at the bottom of Mount Sinai were warned not to even touch the mountain as it was Holy, full of God's pure power.

The problem was that God could not be directly experienced by all the people. He couldn't be close. They had to keep their distance. Only the high priest who entered the most holy place under strict rules and regulations, could experience the presence of God. The heavy curtain separating the inner most part of the temple could not be bypassed by anyone else.

Later in the book of Samuel, the ark of the covenant was carried by the Israelites. In one instance, they took the ark, the presence of God into battle but they were overthrown by the Philistines. They looked upon the ark as an icon, a lucky charm, in effect as, God in a box. God was amongst them but was distant from their thoughts.

God in a box or God behind a curtain was never the plan.

Even when King Solomon built a magnificent temple, to the glory of God. Even on the day of atonement which is still the most sacred day of the year in the Jewish calendar- the day when sacrifices were presented by the high priest on behalf of the people, when man could be at one with God, with his sins forgiven, through a sacrificial ceremony. Even then, this still did not meet expectations of re - establishing the closeness of God, of being ever present.

But, when God became man, Emmanuel, God with us, then Jesus was the presence of God back on the earth. Jesus' death and resurrection meant that there was no longer a need for a priest to present a sacrifice because Jesus fulfilled that, the perfect, acceptable sacrifice, made once for all.

When Jesus ascended back to Heaven, God sent his holy spirit to live within the believers as it describes in Acts 2. So now, at last the presence of God on this earth is established within Christians.

Now Almighty God, holy and awesome is no longer distant, at arm's length. He is near, through his Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 10 says

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters,[f] we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death,[g] Jesus

opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

While there is a distance between earth and heaven, we can connect with God through prayer, through talking to him. As it says in Philippians 4: 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God is no longer far away. He is not hidden behind a curtain or confined by a box. He is close to us, hearing a whispered prayer, a cry for help or a song of praise, all through his holy spirit living within us.



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