

THE POWER OF PRAYER ROOMS (Adam Heather *interviews* Bill Cahusac *and* Louise Yeghnazar)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Genesis 28:10-17 (10-22)

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place¹, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'

Isaiah 56:4,7

This is what the Lord says: "... my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

From the times of the Old Testament Patriarchs to today, men and women have sought out what the early Celtic Christians called 'thin places' – locations where Earth and Heaven seem particularly close; spaces made sacred by the practice of prayer over a long time. Ever since the days of Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 31:1-6), great artistic skill and creativity has often been employed in the construction of places of prayer, frequently incorporating the sense of a story being told through the architecture and decoration of a building, leading worshippers to pause for prayer at stations along a journey into the presence of God. Places and times are significant.

- *Where have you been which has felt like a 'thin place'? Somewhere where God has seemed particularly close? Did it come (as it clearly did for Jacob) as a surprise?*
- *What (if any) has been your experience of a 24-7 Prayer Room?*
- *In what ways have you found various form of creativity to be helpful in the practice of prayer? How has it helped you to encounter God?*
- *How have music, poetry, stories, or the visual arts (icons, paintings, sculptures, movies) taught you or led you to a significant encounter with God?*
- *Many traditional churches incorporate the 'stations of the cross' or stories from the Gospels, either carved into stonework or etched in stained glass. 24-7 Prayer Rooms often incorporate other kinds of stopping points for prayer. How have you found prayer stations to be helpful in your own prayer journey?*
- *In ancient Israel, three times a year all the men were expected to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem 'to appear before the Lord [their] God' (Exodus 23:14-24). Bill spoke of 'the importance of the decision to get up and go' to a prayer room? How might it be helpful to think of it as a 'mini pilgrimage'?*
- *Jesus sometimes prayed late into the night (Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12; 21:37). There is a long Christian tradition of staying awake for a prayer vigil. 'God's heart' Bill says, 'is drawn to sacrifice... there is a cost to dragging yourself to a place in the middle of the night'. Praying at awkward times reminds us that we are 'part of a... train of prayer', giving us a sense of accountability. What is your experience of prayer at inconvenient times?*
- *Louise's practical tip is, 'just do it!... A prayer room is an invitation'. How have you experienced (or overcome) a sense of resistance to signing up for the prayer room? Will you say YES?*

¹ Although the text of Genesis names the place as 'Bethel' (v.19 In Hebrew the name means 'house of God'), many notable scholars withing the Jewish Rabbinic tradition have contended that this was in fact Mt Moriah, the place of the 'binding of Isaac', where Abraham had encountered God many years earlier, and upon which the Jerusalem Temple would later be built.