

God of Eternity with Us

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Preacher: Alan Hoskin

- [0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 26th of May 2002. The preacher is Alan Hoskin.
- His sermon is entitled, God of Eternity With Us, and is based on Isaiah chapter 57, verses 14 to 21.
- Lord, we pray still our hearts. Help us to be conscious of your presence. Teach us more about the wonder of yourself.
- For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Oh, I've got the feeling I've been here before.
- I also remember getting a stiff neck when we had a full church, having to turn both ways. So I hope I can keep your attention at both ends.
- [1 : 09] Paul, the place is a bit messier than we are. It's exciting to hear the plans that you have for this church building.
- Trinity Sunday is a great day to think about God and to acknowledge that we have finite minds and that there's much about God that we can't comprehend.
- We know with the Trinity that there's only one God and yet within that Godhead there are three gods, or three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of them God, and yet somehow we believe one God, yet three gods.
- It's hard for our human minds to take in. I once met a top British scientist who became a Christian precisely because the God he saw Christians trying to present was so complex and indescribable that he said something like this.
- I see complex things in the world around me which are beyond human understanding. And if there is a God, and if he made this world in all its complexity, little wonder that this God would be difficult for humans to describe.
- [2 : 33] I want to share with you this morning another complexity about God that we find made known to us through God's word, the Bible.
- It's just two attributes of God, but they appear to be contradictory, and yet we as Christians hold them in tension. The technical terms are God's transcendence and God's imminence.
- Simply put, it's God's distance from us and his closeness to us. Both pictures of God run right through the Bible.
- You can see something of both the pictures in a verse like Isaiah 57 and verse 15 that we heard for our first reading. It says this, For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.
- I dwell in the high and holy place and with those who are contrite and humble in spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite.
- [3 : 53] So we have in that verse the picture of God high and holy and beyond our understanding of his separateness.

And yet also we have the picture of the God dwelling with the contrite and the humble person. How do we hold those two together? On the one side the transcendence with God's sheer holiness so great, so unfathomable that the psalmist can say what is man that thou art mindful of him or the son of man that thou carest for him.

This great transcendent God is worthy of our worship. On the other hand, the scriptures time and time again point us to the imminent God, the one who is close to us, closer than a brother, one who is a friend, one who is the shepherd who knows us all by name, the one who holds us in the very palm of his hand.

We have to hold these two pictures or concepts or understanding of God together in tension. Let me ask you this morning, where is God for you?

Does he tend to be a bit remote and far away and that's your understanding of where God is? Or is he close to you?

[5 : 34] One that you know personally and intimately. If we don't hold the two in a balance of transcendence and imminence, we can get ourselves into all sorts of trouble.

Let's think, first of all, if we believe God is far away and transcendent above all things, then we could be in danger of thinking, well, if he's that far away, he doesn't really care about me.

And if he's that far away, it doesn't really matter what I do because he won't notice he's too busy with other things. I guess it's the expression, while the cat's away, the mice will play.

If we place God too far away from us, then we'll perhaps not behave the way we know we should as Christians. On the other hand, on the imminent side of things, God can be so familiar like a mate and in the familiarity of knowing God with us all the time, we can be in danger of that saying, familiarity breeds contempt.

And we can just take God's presence for granted. Perhaps take him for granted to the point where we fail to be in awe of him.

[7 : 01] Fail to realise the wonder and the human privilege of Christians being able to worship God. Or we can fail to be in awe of him and sense that he's, because he's so close and he's just a friend to us, that he doesn't really care the way we live.

And that's not true, is it? Our God cares passionately about the way we live our Christian lives. We celebrated last Sunday, Pentecost.

And there is the precious gift of God's Holy Spirit to us. And as I was preparing this sermon, I was thinking, is that the two names reflect in a way the transcendence and imminence.

He's a Holy Spirit. He does care about the way we live our lives. And we do need to hold him in awe as we gather to worship and as we live for him.

But he's also the Spirit who is promised to every believer. When you come to believe in Christ, his promise is that the Holy Spirit would be ours to live in us and dwell in us.

[8 : 17] God himself dwells in us, should hold us in great awe of the presence of God with us and around us. Well, I want to do a little shift and tell you a little bit about what Philippa and I are up to.

But as I do this, I'd like to give you a challenge as a church celebrating your anniversary and the Trinity on Trinity Sunday of a challenge that things you need to be looking towards the future that a church should be doing.

I read this in a book just recently that there are three things that are the church's task. Worship, mission, and the last one might sound a little bit out of place, administration.

Worship, mission, and administration. In this book, the writer said, worship is love on its knees before God.

Mission is love on its feet working and living with the living God. And administration is love at a desk or in a committee planning with God how we can worship to the best of our ability and how we can do mission to the best of our ability.

[9 : 54] So let's just think about those three areas. Worship, love on its knees before God. The greatest thing a human being can do is to worship our creator.

The greatest thing a church can be doing is to worship God as you do here. This is more the transcendent focus of God where just in awe of him we come before him.

Worship is also what we do in the privateness of our own homes gathering or just perhaps one person before God reading their Bible seeking for God to speak to them through it and one person before God in your prayers praying for yourself and others that you know of.

For Philippa and I worship involves travelling hundreds of kilometres to little congregations of an average of about ten Christian people in little churches and sometimes on farming properties where we'll gather together and one of the pastoralists will organise a few of their neighbours to come and we'll worship God together in that setting.

Philippa and I just have had an amazing Easter. How do you celebrate the wonder of Good Friday and the wonder of the resurrection when you have to do a round trip of 800 kilometres?

[11 : 39] You want to be with people on that special occasion so it's perhaps out of the ordinary the amount of travel that we did but it was special nonetheless.

We had to be at Wilcania on Good Friday we had to be at Tilpa on Easter Saturday and Menindee on Easter Day. Well how do you plan a service where you celebrate the whole of Easter just in one on the Good Friday on the Easter Saturday and on the Sunday.

Well I chatted with our Bishop about it and he's been in a parish not quite as big as ours and he gave me a little bit of advice but what we did was for the first half of the service we sang Good Friday hymns we had Good Friday prayers focusing on the wonder of the cross then after that focus we had communion together just an informal breaking of the bread and drinking of the wine just as we gathered around together you can do that when you've got just ten people and that was a precious time then I said okay now we've got to do a little mind shift here and we move from Friday to the Saturday and we then began to sing resurrection hymns with great praise and celebration with resurrection focus for the prayers and somewhere along the line I tried to fit a sermon in that covered the whole lot it's quite a challenge but it was a very very special and a precious time and the people there just value the support that BCA the Bush Church

Aid Society gives through these sorts of ministries not just in outback New South Wales but other places as well okay well worship is love on its knees before God mission is love on its feet working with and living with God this is more the imminent focus of God being with us and we being used by God to reach out with the gospel to others every Christian must be involved in mission just as every Christian must be involved in worship I know at Holy Trinity there are some people who I believe God has given the gift of prayer now that sounds a bit contradictory when I say it's love on its feet but sometimes in the work of mission we need people who are committed to pray for our mission activities and our work and I encourage you in that if you've got that sort of prayer ministry to do it some people have the gift of being generous in giving and your giving goes to support the mission work of the church and that's important as well

I know this church has many link missionaries and you support them in that way for Philippa and I love on its feet mission is not so much love on its feet as love on the tires of the motor car but it's also got two new areas that we're working in I'm working hard to try and learn how the internet works because we are discovering that this is a wonderful way of keeping in touch with people living in very isolated areas our parish I've worked out is about the back quarter of New South Wales and there is no way I'm going to get to spend time with people individually but with the internet I can have good regular contact with people in very isolated places some of the places have satellite phones and things like that and so internet is an easy arrangement for them some don't and they just have a fax machine so I'm looking at ways I can develop a contact regularly through the fax others don't have either of those and so I'll need to still keep up some sort of correspondence contact with them and telephone contact with those mission is love on its feet working and living with

[16:19] God I challenge you as you move ahead as a church to be working together to seek what mission it is that God has for you to develop in this church here at Holy Trinity there are people just around just living in this area who don't know Christ and need to hear about him there are people in Melbourne different things in Melbourne that God might show you as a church where you are to be ministering in mission working with God for the spirit of the gospel well worship love on its knees before God mission love on its feet working and living with God then there was administration it's an odd one I personally wish it wasn't there it's not one of my strong points I noticed a number of the parish council or the vestry that were here when I was here and they would know that's not one of my strong points but it's intriguing that administration is part of

Philip's and my ministry at a based at Broken Hill I've still got to prepare and prayerfully plan for what's going to take place in our worship services around the parish I still need to plan and prayerfully plan with Christians in the different centres looking for ways we can reach out into our own little communities I know Paul must spend a great deal of time in his preparation at his desk and in prayerful planning of what he's going to do Sunday by Sunday and worship and seeking God's direction there if you've got a worship committee your worship committee needs to be prayerful in that area as well somewhere along the line Philip and I fit in these administration sort of things the other part of our ministry based at Broken

Hill that we are developing is hospitality for those of you who've known the work of Bush Church 8 in Broken Hill we've had a hostel there for many many years and it's had a just an amazing ministry to hundreds and hundreds of outback young people they would come in stay at the hostel they'd have their education there while mum and dad were out working on the properties all around well that work has stopped at the end of last year and so Philippa and I are living in the little house parents flat and we're very comfortable there but we've got this huge building with lots of potential for use and already we are getting people pastoralists who come into town because Broken Hill is the centre of the town focus for so many places around they'll perhaps come in for medical reasons perhaps have a vehicle that needs repairing and need somewhere to stay overnight and they stay with us a new development that's just starting is we have students from school of the air they do their schooling on isolated properties but once a term about they come in as little groups to meet their teacher face to face and also to meet their fellow students and the hostel is now being used to accommodate those kids they spend most of their time during the day and at the school of the air base doing whatever activities they're doing but they stay at our place overnight they use our kitchen facilities for meals and things like that and it's great that it can be used that way well worship love on its knees before God mission love on its feet working and living with God administration love at the desk or love in the committee planning with God so that our worship and mission will be the best it can be the holy scriptures give us this balanced this balanced picture of a transcendent God and yet an imminent God how do we take that in we we can't we just hold it in balance as best we are able but it is so vital we hold it in balance don't make God so far away and hold him in such awe that you fail to realize that he wants to live in your life and to work through you day by day in your day by day living don't make the other mistake of having him so close that you fail to be in awe as you gather together

Sunday by Sunday to worship this God of ours that you fail to be in awe as you just come before him to read your Bible and to hear what God's got to say to you as you pray for those you love and for things that you the Lord leads you to pray for we've got to hold those in balance for thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity whose name is holy I dwell in the high and holy place and with those who are contrite and humble in spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite let's pray our heavenly father we pray for your help help us lord to open our minds that we might always be open to learn new things that you would teach us about yourself and lord in that openness of mind also take from our minds things that we've learnt in the past that aren't true to you and aren't right and lord we pray for our church here this morning lord that you will help us to worship you with all our being help us to serve you with all our being and help us and give us wisdom to do all the things that are necessary that we might worship you to the full and serve you in mission to the full for we ask it in Jesus name amen and and