

Sunday 6th April 2025 - Know My Name: This Is The Place

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Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] We are on our last session of Know My Name, and this is the place. This is the place to be. Thank you, Tom.

That's it now. Hey, you're up, Tom. So, good morning.

It's good to see you this morning, because this is the place to be. You've obviously chosen the right place, and it's here with me. Tom.

And all these beautiful people. Did you know that Burntwood is set to become part of Wales? Hence the new signpost.

That's right, isn't it, Cathy? So, it's going to become part of Wales. We all like to think we're in the right place, don't we?

[1 : 01] We all like to be in pleasant surroundings, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of good people.

I don't know if you have a favourite place. As a child, my favourite place was actually snuggled up in bed, especially on a cold winter's night.

And what was special about it was that I could snuggle up with my four friends. So, here they are. So, say hello to Timmy.

My mum knitted him his special outfit. There you go. Say hello to Freddie.

Freddie is a gonk. And I made him in sewing class in primary school. And he's stuffed with my grandmother's stockings.

[2 : 09] There you go. And say hello to Jingalings. And you probably won't go, he has got a little bell on it, that's the way it's called. And he's a blue elephant.

I'm not quite sure where he came from, actually, but that's Jingalings. And finally, say hello to Ronnie. Hi, Ronnie. Ronnie is a felt rabbit. And he was also made in sewing class in primary school. And together, we would snuggle up in bed and dream dreams and have wild adventures. And bed is still a lovely place for me to dream dreams.

And it could be argued that I've never really got rid of my soft toys as I'm now surrounded by an array of different pillows. But, just hopefully, I'm a bit more grown up now.

And my favourite place is probably being in the countryside, in a green field somewhere. Having grown up in the countryside, it was easy for me to find a good green field, rain or shine, and that's where I felt at peace.

[3 : 27] It was a place where I could unwind and feel God's presence. And it's often said that being in God's creation helps us feel closer to God.

The Bible has so many places mentioned where people have felt that bit closer to God. And it really all started in the Garden of Eden.

And the Garden of Eden was where Adam and Eve enjoyed God's presence, until they messed up, that is, and were banished from the Garden. For the people of Israel, as Moses led them from slavery out of Egypt, there were many special places where God met with them in a dramatic way. And, for example, when they crossed the Red Sea on the way to the Promised Land. This place and this event, they're still remembered to this very day. And then there was Mount Sinai, where Moses climbs up and God appears to him and gives him the Ten Commandments.

And again, a momentous event in a special place, which showed the way the people of Israel should live. Mountains were often places in the Bible for significant events.

[4 : 47] And even in the UK here, churches are often built on high places to show that they're special places to be.

And in our own times, we have places we look to as a nation of people. Be it St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, or on New Year's Eve, the London Eye.

They're all places we look to and consider to be of national importance. For people of faith, you may have heard talk of what some people call thin places.

Thin places are where you can actually feel the presence of God. It's as though the boundary between heaven and earth is paper thin. The two merge and become one.

So, maybe you've heard some people say that they really felt God's presence on a visit to the Holy Land, following in the footsteps of Jesus.

[6 : 01] Or a visit to Jerusalem. Or to a church pictured there built on the site where Jesus was born or crucified. Some people find meaning in following the footsteps of the saints.

Perhaps on a pilgrimage to a special place. The island of Iona in Scotland is pictured here. And it's a popular destination. And pilgrimages are very much back in fashion.

As people travel to special sites to discover faith and meaning. For the people of Israel, as they settled in that promised land and made it their home, the most important place became the temple in Jerusalem.

A place where God lived in the Holy of Holies. King Solomon commissioned the building of this temple.

And in the book of 1 Kings, chapter 8, we read, The priests then brought the Ark of the Lord's Covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple.

[7 : 19] The most holy place. And put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. And when the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord.

And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud. For the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud.

I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you. A place for you to dwell forever. So this was good news, right?

At last, all was sorted. We know where to find God. He inhabits a special place. And all we need to do is turn up and worship him.

But what is special when these places are destroyed? Where is God's presence then?

[8 : 28] What happens when it's planned for HS2 to go through your childhood bedroom? What will Timmy, Freddie, Jinglyns and Ronnie make of that?

What happens when your children can no longer enjoy the lovely green countryside because it's so polluted? What happens when the church you found faith in is destroyed?

Where will the people of Ukraine come to worship God? What happens when your hometown basically no longer exists?

Where is the thin place for the children of Gaza? What happens when the places you felt were so secure are secure no longer?

Places that seem safe no longer seem safe. Turkey is one of the latest countries to become a place of uncertainty as protests erupt.

[9 : 43] And the BBC journalist Mark Lowen is deported simply for reporting on it. Greenland, a place we barely notice, suddenly has become a place of political dispute.

And perhaps we're too used to hearing of earthquakes like the one in Myanmar. And social media is increasingly becoming a total nightmare as not even our phones are a safe place.

If we're not careful, we just simply shut down and retreat into our own safe place.

As long as we are in our safe and special place, then that's all that matters. We're no longer part of the European Union.

But the countries of the European Union are very close to what we think is our safe place. And I want you to take a look at this video that the European Union put out only last week to its 450 million citizens.

[10 : 56] It's humorous, it's funny, but at the same time, it's trying to make a serious point about keeping safe. It's Ajal Abid. Welcome to What's in My Bag Survival Edition.

First up, my glasses. Super important if you want to see what is happening or not. Next, my document in waterproof polish.

A must in a rainy Brussels. Now, let's talk about lighting. I have a flashlight. If you don't, don't forget the matches. And of course, the light.

Turb. And water, of course, because water is life. And my special friend. A Swiss army knife. 18 tools in only one knife.

A must-have. And don't forget your medication. You might need it. Because you never know. And don't forget something to eat.

[11:59] You might be hungry. Very hungry. And of course, some cash. In the middle of a crisis, cash is king. And your credit card might just be a piece of plastic.

A charger and a power bank. Because a dead phone is a dead end. Playing cards. A bit of distraction. Never hurt anyone. And don't forget a radio. The smaller one.

This is everything you need to survive the first 72 hours of a crisis. Speaking about being prepared, the EU is preparing its strategy to be sure that every citizen is safe in case of crisis.

Be prepared. Be safe. Be safe. Be safe. God sends his son to be born as a baby.

We're so familiar with this story. But are we? Surely Jesus should be born in the most important place, Jerusalem.

[13:04] And as near to the temple as possible. But he's not. He's born in Bethlehem. An insignificant, small town that wasn't even listed as being important.

And where was Jesus brought up? Well, Nazareth. The people of Nazareth were not wealthy or well-off. At best, they earned a modest living.

And it wasn't a happening place. Or the type of destination that you would draw in many visitors. Not only was the place held in low regard, but so were the people.

They didn't even speak properly with their unpolished dialect. Their lack of culture. And their loose morals. Could this not be more insignificant?

Out of the way? And irrelevant to the mainstream of life? You probably can't see from that there, but it's sort of way up north. You know, way out of the way. Yet these were to be the most important places that we still remember to this day.

[14:17] And then when Jesus begins his ministry, he is with ordinary people in ordinary places. In their homes.

In the crowds. In the out-of-the-way villages. By the lake. And not in Jerusalem. Matt told us last week how Jesus spent time in Bethany.

The town of lepers. The town of lepers. The outcasts. Jesus was to be found everywhere, it seems, where established religion and power was not.

Jesus was to be found in the forgotten places. The places where people suffered and struggled.

These were the places that the powerful Roman Empire and the religious and political rulers saw as unimportant.

We're in the season of Lent. And that's when we're reminded that Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness.

[15:23] It's a time when Jesus understands his calling and draws close to God. A thin place, if you will. But it's a wilderness.

A desert. And yet God is there supporting and sustaining Jesus all the way. And Jesus' relationship with the temple in Jerusalem is an interesting one.

He's clearly not impressed with the way organized religion is run. This was not the place which showed who God is.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Look up. Hey, get here. Thank you.

[17:00] So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

To those who sold doves he said, Get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. His disciples remembered that it is written, Zeal for your house will consume me.

The Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.

They replied, It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days.

But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

[18:15] Now promise me you won't miss next week, because you get the rest of the story then. Right. So Jesus clears the temple courts and declares, Get these out of here.

Stop turning my father's house into a market. And then, in what has to be the most radical shift in all our thinking, Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. They replied, It's taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days. But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. The temple Jesus had spoken of was his body. We deceive ourselves if we think our faith is embodied in a place, or particularly in a church building. Our place from now on is embodied in Jesus, and not in a physical place.

[19 : 40] God comes to us not in a place or a building, but in the very embodiment of Jesus. The precise message of Jesus, indeed, the coming Easter message itself, the message of the risen Christ, is that God is available everywhere.

Just as Jesus' resurrected body moved beyond the limits of place and time, so we can begin to understand that Jesus is indeed everywhere.

Perhaps this is what we mean when we call somewhere a thin place. It is when we sense Jesus is present with us, there and then, in that particular place.

It is when we call somewhere a place. It is not the place that is holy, but simply our realization that Jesus is there with us. What fools we are when we tie God down to a particular place or time.

We like to think that God is here with us, in our church, in our services, and in our theologies. And we like to tie God down so we can control him.

[21 : 02] We like to conform, to fit God to conform and fit in to our place and our way of doing things. But just take a look around at much of what we call church, and unfortunately see just how true that is in wider society.

We make God fit into a place or an activity or into our own way of thinking. The risen Christ breaks free from that tomb-like thinking.

Jesus is not confined by notions of time and place. The trouble with declaring that one place is sacred is we then imagine that other places are not.

That somehow God is not there. Again, just as Matt was saying last week about our homes, they too are a sacred place.

It's not just the time we spend in church or out in nature, but everywhere is a sacred place. Yes, Ukraine, Gaza, an earthquake zone, and the places where Timmy, Freddie, Jinglings, and Ronnie live.

[22 : 23] God is not outside. For too many religious traditions, churches, and ways of thinking, Jesus is out there somewhere, and we must urge him to come to us.

But, as we're told in Acts, his spirit is within us. In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people.

He is here in this place, in the very DNA of all that surrounds us, and in the DNA of who we are. But perhaps that's the problem.

We fail to understand who we are in Christ. There's no division between right here, right now, and over there someplace.

There's just no division between right here, right now, and over there someplace. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asked to pray, Your kingdom come.

[23 : 33] Because God's kingdom is everywhere. God's kingdom is always here, and yet at the same time, not yet here.

No organized religion, no designated special place can hold Jesus. Jesus is here. Jesus is there, and in every place, and of every place.

He cannot be contained. Amen. And so we're back in Bethlehem, it seems. Such an insignificant place, seemingly of no importance.

Yet God appears at the very edges. Many people only see God in important places. And if only we'd take time and simply look.

Because God is present in places that hardly seem to be worth noticing. And if we dare to look, we find Jesus through his spirit in all the unexpected places.

[24 : 40] Jesus through his spirit is always, always here. Jesus through his spirit is in our hearts, our minds, and our souls, and in our very DNA.

So will we take time to look? Jesus is not far away up in heaven. Jesus is not confined to a church building, a prayer meeting, or a holy place.

Jesus is at home with you, right here, right now, in this beautiful, messy, irreplaceable temple of flesh that we call life.

In Psalm 46, be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am. Be still and know. Be still.

[25 : 55] Be. Thank you.