

SERMON: 2017/07/23 - BTR

I'd like us to think about our homes this morning. [Pause]

You know, loneliness is one the biggest problems in America right now.

(In Britain too.)

I've even heard it called 'a public health crisis'.

More and more people report having fewer and fewer (real) relationships.

And the situation - for men, in particular - is *especially* bad:

Statistically, these days, only a minority get married; very few join clubs or sports-teams; and a great deal struggle to establish meaningful friendships.

In fact, many find it hard to even converse, and that's true isn't it?

You see it in bars or around the grill: once the dirty jokes have been exhausted they barely manage to grunt at each other, sipping beer to fill the awkward silence.

The whole alcohol industry is predicated on this sad reality. ;-)

Women, of course, do a little better; but our whole culture and way of life (in the West) is driving us apart, and encouraging deeper and deeper isolation as we chase the dream of "independence" and, "self-sufficiency."

This is the fuel behind consumerism generally:

to have my own space and my own stuff; to not have to borrow or ask for a handout, which would supposedly be beneath my "dignity."

So we *each* buy a hammer or an iPad or a chalet, and meanwhile, as Saint Paul says, "creation groans" [Rom. 8:22].

There are no "communities" (anymore); only people who happen to live in houses sharing a strip of grass or a stretch of sidewalk.

And as we become more and more "detached" - and that is, in British English, at least, a pun - our fear of our neighbours *as* strangers grows too. Because "ignorance isn't bliss," but the opposite, so we grow our hedges a little taller, or, if funds will allow, remove ourselves further away, choosing longer and longer tedious, *toxic* commutes - *and none of this* does our mental or spiritual health any good and not the natural world either:

For we are setting ourselves adrift from the traditional moorings that restrain '[sinful] live[s] [of] to the flesh' [Rom. 8:12], preferring the luxuries that come with the "nomadic" careerism of promotion-chasing rather than being really committed to a place or a group of others beyond my immediate kin.

*But God wants us to belong* - to belong to a a new kind of family: "The Church," which is why, in *Romans 8*, Paul speaks of Him looking to "adopt" us - just as He

once "adopted" Jacob. [Pause]

Like a salesman, Jacob was wandering here and there in the (ancient) Middle East, "adrift" from his home and alone.

And it wasn't good.

For we don't exist for our own sake, but to serve God.

And this aimless "to-ing" and "fro-ing" benefitted no one but the patriarch. It was selfish.

He had cut himself off from Esau and his parents and the complicated, emotional history of all that, and was looking to make his own way in the world, free of those ties; but then, one night, he had this startling dream - of angels and a "ladder," and it was a device, by Heaven, to catch Jacob's attention: "No more self-indulgent traveling," was the message. "Get a grip!"

It was like Jacob had been on an extended "Gap Year." - Do you have that phenomenon here? Teenagers going off to Thailand or India between (high-)school and college to "find themselves"?

Well this moment in *Genesis 28* was that moment when the bank-of-mum-and-dad finally says: "Enough." "Time to grow up. You have responsibilities: stop trying to dodge them."

And what is that responsibility? - for Christians.

To be a "blessing." To be a blessing *from the context that you already inhabit* 'to all th[ose around you]' [Gen. 28:14].

Are you doing that?

That's why the land of Canaan was wrested from the pagans and given to Israel. *To be a resource* for Jacob and his descendants, to bless others *from*.

And what do we mean by that?

To show others the love of God in practical, tangible ways.

And we can see our own homes in this way too: as mini "Promised Lands;" as places *not* to hide in from the broken and non-believers, but as "bases" and "launch pads" from which to help and feed and nurture them.

And this counter-cultural approach will be a hard one to "adopt."

To see my house as God's.

As a gift *given* to me as a *tool*.

*Not* something I've earned: For, let's face it, so much about our journeys is out of our hands and in the Lord's.

- All that we have is always a combination of my will *and His* - and don't forget that.

In fact, allow that truth to transform your attitude about your home, and root your

new outlook in the gratitude that '[w]hile we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' [Rom. 5:8.] Amen.