

NO HIDING PLACE

→ The game of “*hide and seek*” is one of those games that we have probably all played as children, and it continues to live on across the generations – we play it with our own children and grandchildren. And it’s a game which many people enjoy at any age as we try to outwit each other.

.....But it is also a game that I think many people play with mixed feelings. If you are trying to hide from the one who is seeking, you want to find a really good hiding place, because the last thing you want is to be the first person to be found – that’s really embarrassing! However, deep down inside, although you would like to beat the seeker, you don’t want to hide too well, because if you can’t be found, the seeker may well give up on the game, and simply wander off, leaving you to reveal your whereabouts later on - and that’s no fun at all either!

→ Well, however good you may be at playing hide and seek, or however good you may be at hiding your true feelings from your friends or even your family, there is always someone that we cannot hide from and the person who wrote this psalm has come to understand that. It may have taken a long period of time to come to that realisation, but here he expresses his awareness that there really is no hiding from God, however hard we try:

- he acknowledges that God is his creator and therefore knows everything about his physical make up
- he recognises that God is all-seeing and therefore knows what he is thinking at any given moment, let alone what he is about to say
- he understands that God is omnipresent, that there is nowhere in this world that he could go and not find God already there.

.....That almost smacks of “*Big Brother*” watching you doesn’t it? Fly on the wall documentary programmes like “*Big Brother*” and many others besides have become all the rage over recent years. And then perhaps closer to home many of us participate in the use of web-cams, skype, or face time on our iPads and iPods so that we can not only talk to each other, but also see what each other are doing as well. People seem to be fascinated to be able to watch other people’s every movement and word – I’m not quite sure what that says about us as a society really but the growth in the use of social media where we can report on our thoughts and actions at any moment of the day seem to bear that out.

.....For many of us, it would be a rather frightening prospect I imagine – to have someone else watching us twenty-four hours a day, with nowhere for us to hide or even get away for a moments peace. Imagine the sights:

- first thing in the morning with no make up and before you’ve got the straighteners near your hair or your contact lens in
- out on the road when your car has just had a flat tyre and you’re struggling to rectify the situation
- in the supermarket when your carrier bag splits open and spills its contents on the floor, or
- at the end of the day when you’re tired and you’ve just lost your temper with your husband or your wife or your children!

.....None of us are at our best all of the time and for most of us there are parts of our lives, and things about ourselves, that we would rather other people didn't know sometimes.

→ But in our world, our society, even our local communities there are plenty of people who are hiding from reality and working hard at preventing other people from knowing them fully and that happens for all sorts of reasons. It may be because of quite serious or traumatic things in their lives and situations such as addictive behaviours within the family or abuse of one kind or another. It may be because of relationships that are fragile or criminal behaviour. There are all manner of ways in which people's lives are touched with tragedy and trauma, and in some cases the shame or embarrassment that they feel drives them to hide that from other people.

..... But it's not only things as traumatic as these that cause human beings to run scared of other people. As a human race we are desperate to be accepted and loved by other people, and so anything that makes us feel that we are different from everyone else can become a barrier between us. That results in people:

- wearing masks and pretending to be something they are not
- hiding behind their shyness and using it as an excuse not to get close to others
- cutting themselves off from other people completely and living a lonely life
- even moving to a new area or a new country in the hope that their problems won't follow them

→ The Psalmist has discovered there is no hiding place with God. He knows everything about us – our thoughts, our words, our actions, our motives, our whereabouts, our ambitions. And that is not bad news or a frightening prospect, it is in fact the most wonderful news for all of us. Why? Well, let's go back for a moment to that game of hide and seek.

.....When you have hidden really well, and the seeker is struggling to find you, you may well feel really clever and delighted that the seeker is having such a tough time, but there will also be a little part of you that doesn't want to get left behind if everyone else who has been playing the game moves on to something else, because they can't be bothered to look for you any more. So what do you do? Well, in an attempt to be discovered you may try to give a few clues – perhaps you will cough, or stick your toe out from under the curtain in the hope that the seeker will notice.

.....And I think that's a pretty good picture of life as well. What most, if not all of us really want is to be fully known by at least one other person, to be accepted just as we are, warts and all, and to be loved despite all the things that we think are wrong with us. We don't want to be hiding, and pretending, and covering things up because it's a lonely place to be.

→ Think for a moment about the close relationships you do have in your life – your relationship with your husband or wife, your relationship with your children or grandchildren, your relationship with your closest friend. Aren't these relationships the most wonderful things – to have people:

- who know almost everything, if not everything about you, and yet they still love you
- in whose company you love to be
- who think you are the *"best thing since sliced bread"*

.....And isn't it true that when you are really close to someone else:

- they can finish your sentences for you because they know what you will say
- they will know where you are likely to be at any given time in the day
- they will know how you're likely to react in a particular situation

.....and that's not a frightening prospect, that's a comforting thought isn't it?

.....And so with God. The Psalmist saw God's all-seeing and all-knowing as a positive feature in his life, not a negative thing at all. He saw it as a reason to praise God. He saw it as a way of ensuring that his life remained on the right track.

→ For all of us, God's ability to know us from the inside out is "*good news.*" We will all know from our own **experience** of life, that if we are harbouring some **secret** then it can become a very **heavy burden** after a while, and whatever the **consequences**, it is a most wonderful feeling when someone else gets to know the **truth** of the matter and is able to support us and share in the experience of whatever it is that we are going through.

.....Whatever we have **done**, whatever we have **experienced**, whatever we have **hidden** from other people in the past, there is never any point in trying to hide it from God, because he **already knows**, he **already understands** and he still **loves** us. Remember that, as the psalmist put it, "*darkness and light are both alike to him.*"

.....The only way for any one of us to experience **real freedom and a sense of wholeness** in our lives, and truly be ourselves, is to get to **know** God for ourselves, and allow ourselves to be **fully known** by him. And when we have done that, let us also be people who **encourage** others to do the same.

.....As we share in bread and wine in just a moment and remember the life of Christ lived so openly in front of those around him, may we make the words of the Psalmist our **prayer** when he said "*Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; see for yourself whether I've done anything wrong – then guide me on the road to eternal life.*" Amen