

Micah 5.2-5

How to live securely

Amington

Sunday 23 December 2018

Getting ready

Just before Christmas, two brothers were spending the night at their Grandma's house. At bed time, they knelt down to say their prayers. As they closed their eyes, one boy said in a loud voice, 'Dear Lord, please ask Santa Claus to bring me a new computer, a telescope and a new bike.'

His older brother said, 'Why are you shouting? God isn't deaf.'

'I know,' said his brother, 'but Grandma is.'

The big day is nearly here... The vicarage is in no way ready for Christmas yet, so I hope most of you are more ready than we are!

Advent is a time of preparation for the future, for looking ahead – and I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a little unsettled about 2019. Brexit looms large – who knows what will happen? How can we prepare for something we don't know anything about?

Small

Well the sermon this morning is brought to you by three words – the first of which is **small**.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are **small** among the clans of Judah...

Micah 5.2a (NIV)

In fact, Bethlehem was so small and insignificant, that when Joshua was dividing up the land between the twelve tribes, he didn't even mention it. 115 towns and villages were listed – but Bethlehem was not one of them.

It came to slightly more prominence as the ancestral home of King David – but he made Jerusalem his home (known as the 'City of David') so even then Bethlehem was still regarded as insignificant.

I have to say – in many ways Amington Church is small and insignificant. We are stuck on the end of Tamworth, stuck on the end of the diocese. There are barely any road signs to Amington – and we aren't even the only St Editha's in town... only this week £1,000 that was meant for us went to the *other* St Editha's... barely a wedding goes by without someone going to the *other* St Editha's... it hardly ever happens the other way round though!

And yet... God is moving among us. We have Mandy working as a Mission Apprentice. We've just come to the end of one of the best Alpha Courses I've ever been part of. The Ark is going from strength to strength. The 10.30 congregation numbers are up 50% - that's *50%* - over the past couple of years.

Things aren't perfect – we need to have a hard look at our finances – things will *never* be perfect this side of heaven. But God is at work among us. As I look out, I see people in whom God has been and is at work today. Many of you may not even realise it – it's not always easy to spot in ourselves. But he is.

You see, sometimes *we* can feel as though *we* are insignificant and small. We think, why would God bother about little old me? We pray for other people, but never for ourselves – as if we don't matter to God.

But friends, *being small and insignificant doesn't matter to God*. He didn't choose Israel because they were a strong, numerous and powerful nation – he chose them out of love. Throughout the Bible God calls, chooses and works through people who are weak, insignificant – and sometimes even pathetic. Think King David himself, a shepherd; Gideon, a coward; Mary and Joseph; the disciples – time and again God chooses the weak, not the strong.

Why?

Because it isn't about how strong we are, it's about how great God is.

That's why God chose Bethlehem for Jesus to be born, rather than Jerusalem. He was making a point, about his power to use even the smallest, most insignificant person or place – even Amington.

Abandoned

A woman is pregnant and goes to the hospital with her husband.

Once there, the doctors tell her about new technology that will give some of her pain to the baby's father. She and the husband are up for it, and when she starts to give birth, they start out by transferring 20% of the pain.

Her husband doesn't really feel anything, so he figures he might as well take as much of his wife's pain away as possible. The wife gives birth painlessly, and she and her husband go home with their new baby.

And find their postman passed out on the doorstep.

The first word is **small**, the second word is **abandoned**:

Therefore Israel will be **abandoned**

until the time when she who is in labour bears a son...

Micah 5.3a (NIV)

Verses like this are hard to read. We tend to have a rather cuddly view of God, like a kindly sort of Grandpa, or Santa. How can such a God *abandon* his people? How is that 'love'?

The truth is, God is love – but God is not *only* love. God is also holy. God is just. God is jealous. God is awesome, terrifying (in the sense of commanding respect, rather than being afraid).

And that means, our sinfulness matters. Sin is not a little slip-up here or there, sin is a mind-set, a attitude of pride, which comes from a broken and damaged heart – sin is rebellion, turning away from God, choosing to ignore him and live our own way, not his.

So when Micah talks about Israel being **abandoned**, it isn't God being cruel, *it's God giving his people what they want*; they rejected him, they lived their own way, not his, and so *he gave them what they wanted*: they didn't want him, so he abandoned them.

But it wasn't easy.

‘How can I give you up, Ephraim?’

How can I hand you over, Israel?’

Hosea 11.8 (NIV)

God hated abandoning his people – as much as he hated their rebellion, the sin they kept committing, as much as he longed for them to turn back to him in repentance.

God is love – and God is holy. He *cannot* be in the presence of sin. It’s bit like Jess and freshly ground pepper... she simply *cannot* be in its presence without gagging (!)... It’s a *bit* like that... Except in a far greater and more profound way.

And that is why the cross was so painful for Jesus – not the physical pain: the pain of sin tearing him away from his Father’s presence.

If we persist in sin, deliberately and wilfully ignoring God – then we risk God abandoning us, giving us the very thing we want: life without him.

Friends, sin is serious. That’s why we have a confession at every service. It’s not because I think you are a particularly naughty bunch – it’s because we *all* need to say sorry to God, and turn back to him in a daily cycle of repentance and forgiveness.

Secure

All that might sound like we are on shaky ground. But God is *not* sitting over us, waiting for us to mess up, so he can go, ‘A-ha! God you!’ No! God is not like that at all. He wants, longs to be with us – his *name* is ‘Emmanuel’ which means ‘God with us’. God wants us to follow him, to draw near to him, to live close to him.

And that’s where Micah ends up; the first word was **small**, the second word **abandoned** – but the third word is **secure**.

[Israel’s ruler] will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live **securely**, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

Micah 5.4 (NIV)

It doesn’t depend on our wealth, our power, our technology, or any other thing we might have. It doesn’t depend on anything down here or in here, because it depends only on God. We can say:

Not because of who I am, but because of what You’ve done. Not because of what I’ve done, but because of who You are.

Who am I (Casting Crowns)

Friends, true security can *only* be found in God. He alone is the firm foundation, the **solid rock**, on which we *must stand*, because, as the old hymn says, **all other ground is sinking sand**.

God is our solid rock, and he invites us to stand, together, on him, firm and secure. And we do that through a continual – daily – repentance, turning away from our sin, and turning back to God. A faithful Christian life is not really about the big moments – it's about all those small moments, those everyday decisions and encounters.

In a few days the New Year will begin. 2019. The year of Brexit. The year of all sorts of things, some good, some bad, some easy, some challenging, some happy, some sad.

Friends, if you want to **live securely** in 2019, if you want to know true peace, there's only one place you'll find it – and that's in God.

So whatever happens in 2019, it is my prayer that all of us might learn how to walk more closely with God, resting securely on his grace and power, trusting in him, turning to him every day, and in every way.

We may not know what the future holds
– but we know who holds the future.