

Encounter

4th & 11th July 2021

Key Scriptures

- Exodus 40:33-37
- 2 Chronicles 7:1-3
- Haggai 2:4-7
- Ezra 6:15-22
- Nehemiah 8:1-6

Introduction

As we prepare to be a gathered people we recognise that God is not calling us to return to where we were fifteen months ago, he is calling us on into a new start. Encounter is one of our core values alongside Generosity, Family, and Transformation. These values are central to our life together at Christ Church. These notes cover two weeks of teaching.

Summary

When the Israelites return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon they built a new temple and a new city wall. This is the second temple, preceded by the temple Solomon built and before that the tabernacle. At the dedication of the tabernacle (Exodus 40:33-34) it was covered by a cloud and filled with the glory of the Lord. Similarly at the dedication of the first temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-3) there was fire from heaven and the temple was filled with the glory of the Lord.

After the foundations of the second temple were laid, there was a celebration of worship and praise (Ezra 3:10-13). This was followed by a pause in construction due to opposition, during which the prophet Haggai spoke to the people bringing God's instruction and encouragement (Haggai 2:4-7). Through Haggai, the Lord declared to the people of Israel "I am with you," "My Spirit remains among you" and "I will fill this house with glory." God, through His word, prompted them to recommence the work and the temple was completed. The temple was dedicated with great joy (Ezra 6:15-22).

When the second temple was dedicated, there was no cloud or fire and the temple was not filled with the glory of the Lord. However, the absence of these visible manifestations of God's presence did not appear to affect the people's awareness that God was present or the joy with which they celebrated and worshiped. They took God at his word when he said "I am with you" and "My Spirit remains among you." The people of Israel were not waiting for yesterday's encounter with God, they were ready for today's encounter. They came expectant that God was with them without prescribing the way in which God would demonstrate His presence.

This expectancy is also seen in Nehemiah 8 when the walls have been completed and they read the book of the Law of Moses (parts of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible). They lifted their hands to God, then bowed down and worshiped Him with their faces to the ground. They were aware that God was with them. There is no cloud, or fire, no glory of the Lord, but God is with them.

The wind and fire return at Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit. God's temple is no longer a building, it is His people. When we choose to follow Jesus, we too are filled with the Holy Spirit. Whether we are aware of God's presence or not, God is with us. In this sense, we are always in the place of encounter, for God is dwelling in us. However, there are also

times of encounter when we are especially aware of God's presence. Our role in this is simply to show up, to say to God "here I am." We wait in the presence of the Holy Spirit knowing that we are encountering God because He is with us, and that we will encounter God in the ways he chooses.

Questions/Actions

1. Share some of your experiences of encounter with God.
2. Are you ready for today's encounter with God?
You may like to share things that make this difficult for you. Perhaps you have a particular moment of encounter that you want God to repeat and this prevents you from encountering God in a new way?
3. Are there rhythms that you've established that help you encounter God? Perhaps daily or weekly routines and actions.
4. How do you feel about saying "here I am" to God?
5. What fruitfulness has come from your encounters with God?
6. Worship and pray together, wait in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - What is the Holy Spirit saying?