Shall we pray together? May the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you, Godde our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen. Amen.

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Godde!” the writer of this psalm calls out, sings with his whole heart. The psalmist is dancing as well perhaps, bending her entire being to the anticipated joy of encountering the living Godde in the temple at Jerusalem. “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Godde! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD!”

Scholars of scripture have been studying the psalms for...probably thousands of years. This psalm, they would say, is a pilgrim psalm.1 Because in the time that the psalms were written it was thought that Godde’s presence was to be found particularly in Jerusalem, we can understand why the Hebrew people yearned so for the temple. We can see why a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was so joyously anticipated, despite the difficult journey getting there.

Psalm 84 is rich with beautiful imagery. The temple, for example, is so open, so magnetic, so invitational, that even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow a nest for herself.

The summer I was on the Isle of Iona in Scotland the younger volunteers would often put together exquisitely lovely worship services in the small stone chapel next to the abbey. This worship would be held late in the evening. We would crowd into the small space and sit on the stone floor singing haunting Taize songs, repeating the simple tunes again and again until the chapel reverberated with our longing and our praise. And the swallows would come. Sometimes only a few, often a whole flock, swooping through the rafters, stirring the air above us, bringing another kind of beauty into our worship.

I am especially drawn to verse 10 of this psalm: “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my Godde than live in the tents of wickedness.” It is the phrase “doorkeeper in the house of Godde” that captures my imagination. Perhaps the doorkeeper in the Jerusalem temple was not permitted to actually enter the temple itself. If that is the case, the psalmist is saying that he would rather be on the fringes of this sacred space than resting in the comfortable tents of wickedness. The writer of the psalm would rather be the greeter-at-the-door of holiness than lord-of-the-tent of Godde’s absence.

We do not believe that Godde is only or even particularly found in Jerusalem. It is, of course, the story of Jesus that opens the door wider for us, so wide that there may be no door at all any more. Godde? The Godde of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The magnificent Creator Godde? This Supreme Being chooses to become a human being!

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1 According to Bernhard W. Anderson in Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today. The “scholarly” portion of this sermon comes from his writings in this volume.
In Jesus, God enters humanity and makes a temple of a particular body. We know
the story, of course. We have heard it so often that we sometimes lose the astounding
implausibility of it. How can this be? The Maker of Galaxies Without Number, the Cre-
tator of Whole Universes within the Tiniest Particles of Matter, this Utterly Mysterious
One, has become a human, and through this human has shown us that Love is God’s
only intention for creation. Love is stronger even than death.

And if this one man’s body, the body of Jesus, can be a temple, can be a dwell-
ing place for the Divine, then isn’t it possible, isn’t it probable, that our bodies, too, can
be temples for the Living Godde? What wonder! That the Living Godde would choose
to live within us! It is almost too much to take in. How can this be?

Here I am, weaving these threads of reason for something that perhaps we all
take for granted. Are our bodies Godde’s temples? Is this something that we feel about
ourselves? Is it a deep truth of who we are? What would it mean to say of our own
selves, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Godde”?

There was a front page photo in the Portland Press Herald this past week that
echoed into this scripture for me. It was a shot of the interior of a no-longer-functioning
Roman Catholic church in Biddeford. The picture was taken in the sanctuary, the center
aisle filled with long tables full of things that were going to be offered at an upcoming
yard sale. It was painful to see all this clutter in the worship space of that church.

That newspaper photo is an image for me for what we sometimes do with the
temple of our own bodies, our own souls. Sometimes we forget to be doorkeepers for
the sacredness of our own beings, and we fill this sacred space, this holy ground, with
busy, distracting, even destructive clutter. For example, there are endlessly pervasive
images waiting for us on our televisions and computers. Do some nurture our souls and
others diminish us? There is a vast range of movie images that draw our eyes, some so
violent that something inside us must shrivel in the seeing. Could we be better door-
keepers for the temples that we are?

I am not proposing that we shut ourselves off from all that is painful. This is im-
possible. I need to know, for example, about the factory workers in the GM parts plant
outside Bogota, Colombia who are on a hunger strike. Because no one has responded
to their year-long protest encampment outside the factory, these men have sewn their
own lips shut. They will die painfully if no one now responds to their pleas for justice.

I need to know this so that I can be aware of what my easy life costs other peo-
ple. I need to know this so that I can offer prayers for those men. The sanctuary of
Godde, Godde’s dwelling place, is not only a place for beauty and joy and praise. It
must also be a place to bring our own suffering and the suffering of others, a place to
offer it up to Godde.

For us this sanctuary, this house of Godde, is the Tory Hill Meetinghouse. I can
no longer count the number of people who have come into this space for the first time –
for weddings or funerals, often – who speak of the beauty and sense of Spirit that they
feel here. Even strangers know that this holy ground.

While we may suspect that Godde’s temple is everywhere, we nonetheless need
this home base, this holy ground, this church that is, in itself, a reminder of the sacred-

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Echoing our bulletin Thought for the Day: “No place or structure or the whole earth itself can contain
God (permanently or temporarily), but we humans need a focus point, a base camp, a reminder, a haven,
founded in God’s name.” -Kathryn Matthews Huey
ness we often lose track of in our day-to-day lives. We can easily say of the Tory Hill Meetinghouse, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Godde.”

OK. I am still very drawn to this image of a doorkeeper in the house of Godde. If this church is Godde’s temple, what would it mean to be the Tory Hill doorkeeper? Is it the job of a doorkeeper to keep out the riffraff? Or is it the job of the doorkeeper to open the door wide and invite everyone in?

The choir used to sing an anthem called, “Jesus Lets Everyone In,” a delightful song written by a teenager whose church was in the midst of the Open and Affirming process. [Sing.] “Jesus lets everyone in.” This is the hallmark of his ministry, this reaching out to include those whom his culture relegated to the margins and labeled “outsider.” This is the doorkeeping Jesus models. It is invitational, magnetic, open to whoever might come through the open door – like the Iona swallows – to surprise us with the beauty of their presence.

Last Sunday the gathering at Pleasant Point was small, yet every one of us was profoundly aware of the sacredness of that place. River and sky, trees and birdsong, gently whispering breezes – such images heal and soothe and nourish us. As doorkeepers of our own souls we would do well to take ourselves often to such places. And to beautiful music, and loving conversations. Also to caring communities, such as this one, where we can look at each other, shake our heads in wonder, and say, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Godde!”

Our souls long, indeed they faint for the courts of Godde, and the daily adventure, the daily gift, is to recognize the “courts of Godde” all around us, and then to sing for joy to the living Godde, “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.”

Amen.