

What We Keep, What We Carry

Hi folks. I've had quite a few 'interesting' weeks recently, so putting some of this into words, and then having the opportunity to explore it through the Bible study recently, has been surprisingly cathartic.

People keep asking me about my summer. On the whole it's been a good one, although our actual holiday happens at the end of September! But this summer has been different.

For 55 years, one particular house was home. It was my mum's home, but it was also part of the landscape of my life. It held childhood, family gatherings, ordinary days, difficult days, laughter, arguments, celebrations and countless small moments that somehow become memories. This summer, as Mum moved into a care home, I found myself saying goodbye to that home.

You might imagine that clearing a house after 55 years is mostly practical. What do we keep? What can be given away? What needs throwing out? But it soon becomes clear that you aren't simply sorting through things. You are sorting through memories. A photograph can take you somewhere you haven't been for decades. A particular mug can bring back the kitchen table. A piece of furniture can carry the memory of countless conversations. Something worth very little financially can feel almost impossible to part with.

And then there are the things that make you wonder why on earth anyone kept them! After 55 years, a house accumulates things. Things inherited, things saved "just in case", things that haven't been used for years but somehow still seem important. It made me think about the strange relationship we have with possessions.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells the story of a man whose harvest is so plentiful that he doesn't have enough room to store it. His answer is to build bigger barns. Jesus seems to be asking something deeper than whether having lots of possessions is good or bad. What does the man think all this accumulation will give him? Security? Comfort? Control? A sense that his future is safe?

Clearing a family home brings those questions into sharp focus. Because not everything we keep has financial value. A photograph, a child's drawing or an old jumper might be worth almost nothing, yet mean everything. Sometimes we aren't really keeping the object. We are keeping the memory. And that makes letting go complicated.

There can be sadness, gratitude, relief, frustration, laughter and grief, sometimes all within the same afternoon. We can know that a change is right and still grieve what is being lost. Perhaps that is one of life's stranger forms of grief. Nobody has necessarily died, but something has nevertheless come to an end. The home we knew is no longer quite the same.

A house can contain all sorts of things: love and irritation, laughter and arguments, birth and death, celebration and disappointment. A house can hold a whole life. But eventually, we have to let go.

Jesus finishes his story by talking about being "**rich toward God.**" Perhaps the measure of a life isn't ultimately how much we manage to store, but what we have given, loved, remembered and shared.

What if the things that matter most are precisely the things we can't put into boxes? A house can be emptied, but the love that happened there doesn't disappear. Furniture can be moved, but the conversations remain part of us. Objects can be given away, but the stories they helped us remember can remain.

Perhaps this is the difference between **what we keep and what we carry.**

We cannot keep everything. We cannot keep every possession, preserve every place or stop time. But we can carry something with us. Stories. People. Love. Wisdom. Laughter. Loss. Faith.

The Bible is full of people who leave home. Abraham leaves his familiar surroundings. The Israelites wander through the wilderness. Jesus spends much of his ministry on the road, meeting people around tables, beside lakes and in other people's homes. Home isn't always a permanent address.

There is a beautiful image in John's Gospel where the Word becomes flesh and "lives among us". The language has the sense of the Divine pitching a tent among us. I love that image. The Divine doesn't simply meet us in permanent, perfect places. The Divine travels. The Divine makes a home among us. Perhaps when familiar places change, we haven't necessarily lost everything. The house can be emptied. The furniture can be moved. The rooms can become someone else's. But the stories remain. The love remains. The people who shaped us remain part of who we are. And perhaps the Divine remains too.

After 55 years, saying goodbye to a family home has reminded me that we don't ultimately get to keep the places we love. But perhaps that's okay. Because home was never just the walls. It was the life that happened within them. And perhaps, in the end, home is not simply somewhere we live. It is something we carry.

Peace, Rob