

11th October 2020

Place

“Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”

Bible, Genesis 28:16

Locus Iste is a sacred motet composed by Anton Bruckner in 1869. The text is from a Latin *Graduale*, sung at a Mass for the annual celebration of a church's dedication, the complete phrase being *Locus iste a Deo factus est*: “This place was made by God”. Bruckner set it for four unaccompanied voices for the dedication of a chapel in the New Cathedral in Linz, Austria, where he had been cathedral organist. It's much loved by amateur and professional choirs, a beautiful version by *Tenebrae* being my favourite.

But notwithstanding the use of *Locus Iste* in the celebration of sacred buildings, must we confine the nature of God to a sacred space? The words are based on the Biblical story of Jacob's Ladder, with Jacob saying. “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not”, and the story of the Burning Bush, where Moses is told, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground”. For Jacob, God was in a desert place, at a time of wrestling with a guilty past and an unknown future. For Moses, God was in a moment of surprise, with revelation, mystery and challenge breaking into an ordinary day's work. God in a desert of uncertainty ... God in a moment of inspiration ... No church. No cathedral. No sacred space. But two men meeting God because, one way or another, they were attuned to his presence and call.

We need our sacred spaces, from Linz Cathedral to our local church, from grandeur and symbolism to simplicity and familiarity. But don't let's limit the revelation of God to this place or that. Be aware of God in the gardens and deserts of life, the clarity and mystery of faith, the expected and unplanned moments of holiness, the inspiration and uncertainty of purpose. God will *not* be confined. Jacob and Moses knew that, and as I listen again to *Tenebrae's* rendition of Bruckner's *Locus Iste*, so do I, such that I can say now, right where I am, in the rededication of this very chapel of my simple life: “This place was made by God”.

A prayer for today

*Living God, your presence is not to be confined. Your revelation is not to be limited.
Help me today to be open to you, and to find you in the whole of life. Amen.*

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