

Yearning to be in the house of God!

Rev. Simon Y. Lee

Dear brothers and sisters of RCAC,

Do you yearn to be back at church? I do. It has been 14 months since the lockdown of the church due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When it started, I was hoping that it would last maybe till the end of the summer of 2020. Then it stretched to the end of the year and we had hoped with the beginning of vaccination, we should be back by the end of the summer of 2021. But now with the new variants of the virus spreading rapidly, with over 1000 cases each day, and the shortage of the vaccines, it seems the end is nowhere to be seen. I hope that we are all keeping well, but we all yearn for the day when it is safe to return.

The psalmist (of the Sons of Korah) once wrote of a remarkably similar experience of yearning, though of course in a very different situation, and we find it in Psalm 84. A probable scenario was the writer could not go to Jerusalem to worship, maybe to celebrate one of the three annual feasts (Ex. 23:17; 34:23), for whatever reason. His sole desire was to “appear before God in Zion.” (7) He “desperately want to (“my soul longs, it even pines for”) be in the courts of the Lord’s temple.” (2a) What can he do? How can he deal with such a hopeless situation? What can he teach us for our situation today?

1. Maintain your delight in the Lord (1-4)

In the pandemic, instead of sitting around bored and miserable, or trying to do all sort of things to fill the void, we can see how the psalmist maintains his focus on the delight of going to the temple to worship God. He describes the temple as “lovely” or “beautiful.” It is lovely not necessarily because of the architecture, important as that is, but because it is “the place where God (you) lives,” His house (4, 10) and the place where God’s glory dwells (Ps 26:8). Yet we also know that God cannot be contained in man-made buildings (Acts 7:45-50). So, while to pay special respect for the house of God dedicated for His worship and yearn to be there, we can also worship God anywhere. The heart of the psalmist is always yearning to worship, with joy, the living God (2). The psalmist is even envious of the birds and the swallow that can nest in the temple courts, to be near the altars of the Lord of hosts (the heaven’s army). By that he means that one is “blessed” to “live in your temple and praise God continually.” (4) So even though today we cannot physically be at the Church where we gather to worship as a community, we can still meet virtually together, or meet God personally wherever we are, enjoying being in his presence. We know that one day our delight and hope will become a reality. May it be soon.

2. Draw your strength from the Lord (5-8)

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.” (5, ESV) We find our strength in the Lord, and we can approach Him anytime as if there is a map to God (Zion) written on our hearts, and we can be like the pilgrims who are on their way. The number of pilgrims grows bigger as they drawn near to the temple. They have gone through the valley of Baca (weeping or affliction) that God has turned into a spring. The rain has covered the dry valley will pools of water. What a meaningful picture of God’s blessings on all who seek to draw near to God. Whatever difficulties or pain we are experiencing, God can turn them into fountains of joy. It is interesting to note that while the throngs of pilgrims travel together, we note that “*each* appears before God in Zion.” (7) We draw strength from drawing to God both as a community and as individuals. This we can continue to do in the pandemic.

### 3. Put your trust in the Lord (9-12)

The psalmist recognized that it is a blessing to be able to put his trust in the Lord of host. (12) To be in the house of God for a day is better than spending a thousand days elsewhere. (10a) It would already be a privilege to just stand at the gate (doorkeeper?) of the house of the Lord, and it is certainly much better than living in the tents of the wicked (10b). The fact that the psalmist was of the sons of Korah may give us a clue as to why he sees this as such an honour. Levites in their service also guarded the sanctuary (I Chron. 9:19). Korah was a Levite who rebelled against God and Moses and was slain (Num. 16:26). However, his children (sons of Korah) were spared and continued to serve at the temple (Num 26:11). Therefore, the psalmist declared, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." (11) We are blessed by a God who is merciful and can be trusted, even though we are unworthy. No matter what background we may have or whatever past we have come from, we can always draw near to God. The only thing we must do is to live with integrity. Many of us also recognize it is a joy to serve God whatever role we may have, be it big or small, even during this pandemic.

May we yearn to be in the house of God!

Your servant in Christ,

Rev. Simon Lee

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羨慕渴想神的殿

親愛的列宣家弟兄姊妹：

你渴望回到教堂嗎？我肯定是。自從教堂因 COVID-19 大流行而被封鎖以來已經過去了 14 個月。當它開始的時候，我還希望它可以持續到 2020 年夏天就結束。但它一直延續到去年年底，我們便希望隨著疫苗接種的開始，我們應該在 2021 夏天結束前回去教會。可惜這病毒的新變種正在迅速傳播，每天有 1000 多例，而且疫苗又短缺，因此似乎回教會又遙遙無期了。我希望我們都安全健康，我們都渴望早日安全返回教會。

詩人可拉之子曾經寫過一篇非常相似嚮往回聖殿的經歷，儘管當時情況很不一樣，我們在詩篇 84 中找到了共鳴。也許是詩人乃出於想去聖殿慶祝猶太人每年三個大慶典之一，而不能成行（出 23: 17; 34: 23），他唯一的願望是“出現在錫安的上帝面前”。（7）他“迫切希望（“我的靈魂渴望，甚至渴望”）在主殿裡的院子。（2a）他能做什麼？他如何應對這種絕望的局面？他給予我們今天的情況有些什麼教導？

### 1. 保持對主愛慕喜悅的心（1-4）

在疫情大流行中，我們可以看到詩篇作者的心如何保持專注於嚮往在聖殿敬拜神的喜悅，而不是沉緬於無聊苦悶和情緒低落之中，或試圖做各種事情來填補心中的空虛。他形容神的殿宇是何等“可愛”或“美好”。聖殿之所以可愛不在於其建築設計的美麗，而是因為它是“神的居所”、神的家(4、10)及神榮耀的所在(詩 26: 8)。但我們也知道，神不能被限制於人手所造的建築之中（徒 7: 45-50）。因此，在特別尊重敬拜上帝並渴望在聖殿上帝之家之同時，我們亦可以在任何地方敬拜上帝。詩人的心一直渴望快樂地敬拜永生的上帝（2）。詩人甚至羨慕可以在聖殿院子築巢的鳥兒和燕子，這些鳥兒和燕子可靠近萬軍之主（天國的軍隊）的祭壇。他的意思是說，一個“有福”的人，就是哪些可以“住在你的聖殿裡，不斷讚美上帝。”（4）因此，即使今天我們不能親自來到教會聚集，一起進到社群行禮拜的教堂，我們仍然可以虛擬地相遇，或者無論身在何處，都可以親身到神面前，享受在他面前的喜樂。我們知道，有一天，我們的喜悅和希望將成為現實。可能很快就實現。

### 2. 從主那裡汲取力量（5-8 節）

“靠你有力量，心中嚮往通到聖殿大道的，這人是有福的。”（5《新譯本》）我們在主裡找到了自己的力量，我們可以隨時親近他，就好像我們心中刻有走向上帝（錫安）的地圖一樣，我們可以像朝聖者在朝聖。當朝聖者靠近聖殿時，朝聖者的數量就不斷增加。他們經歷了巴卡（哭泣或苦難）山谷，上帝將它變成了泉源。雨水已經覆蓋了乾燥的山谷，積水成池。上帝對所有尋

求親近上帝的人的祝福真是有意義的描繪，淋漓盡致。無論我們遇到什麼困難或痛苦，知道上帝都可以將它們變成喜樂的源泉。有趣的是，當朝聖者聚集在一起時，我們注意到詩人強調“每個人都出現在錫安的上帝面前”。

(7) 無論是作為群體還是作為個人，我們都從親近上帝汲取力量。我們可以在大流行中繼續這樣做。

### 3. 信靠耶和華 (9-12)

詩人認識到能夠信靠萬軍之耶和華是一種祝福。(12) 在神的殿裡一日比在其他地方一千日更好。(10a) 僅僅站在主殿的大門上(作門衛?)已經是一種特權，而且肯定比住在邪惡的帳篷中要好得多(10b)。詩篇作者是可拉的兒子，這一事實可以為我們提供線索，說明他為何認為這是一種榮耀。原來在職的利未人也守衛著聖所(代上 9:19)。可拉是一個利未人，背叛了上帝和摩西而被殺了(民 16:26)。但是，他的孩子們(可拉的兒子)得以倖免，繼續在聖殿裡服事(民 26:11)。因此，詩人宣稱：“因為耶和華上帝是太陽與盾牌。耶和華賜福與榮耀。他沒有阻止那些直立行走的人的好事。”(11) 即使我們不配，我們也有一位仁慈且可以信賴的上帝的賜福。無論我們有什麼背景或有什麼過去，我們總是可以親近上帝。我們唯一必須做的就是過著誠信之生活。我們中的許多人也認識到，即使在這種大流行期間，無論大小事情，我們都可以侍奉上帝，這是一種喜悅。

願我們的心也羨慕渴想一起在神的殿敬拜與侍奉！

主僕，

李耀全牧師