

## A Blessing on Our Homes

# Attics, Lofts, Cellars and Sheds

### **Scripture**

#### ***The Transfiguration***

*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*

*Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

*When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.*

*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Matthew 17: 1-9*

#### **Opening Prayer**

We give thanks for the gift that is home,  
We bless the one who gave us life that we might experience love  
We bless the ones with whom we live and share that love.  
We bless this day and watch for the blessings it holds in wait.  
We bless those we know and love now in their own homes.  
May we always be truly grateful and ever-loving good Lord. Amen.

## Attics, Lofts, Cellars and Sheds Text

This topic is not all that different from our reflection on play, at least in part. But whereas, play is permitted or tolerated in the main body of a house, the idea of disappearing from supervision is a little transgressive. At least, that's how it felt for me, growing up in a rather large house that had once served as a presbytery, how spooky is that?

The house had a loft that was accessed by a step ladder kept in a cupboard sized room that was itself a repository for all kinds of stuff. A convenient store for things that would seem out of place anywhere else. If I recall things correctly, it was where winter coats and the like hung on one wall, there were shelves for miscellaneous boxes, room for the vacuum cleaner and its accoutrements, brooms etc. And, lurking at the back, lagged in its own padded anorak, a huge hot water tank. But I digress, although I also used to do that in this room; it always invited a bit of a rummage to see if anything interesting had been deposited since the last visit. Eventually, the ladder legs were safely splayed and seven or eight steps later the plywood board that served as a trap door pushed upwards.

Then came the slightly perilous bit for a small boy; heaving myself from the platform at the top of the ladder into the loft. Here the eyes had to adjust to the much dimmer light emerging from the room below and small gaps elsewhere. Then there was the strict discipline of walking only on the joists to avoid a size six shoe penetrating the ceiling into any of the bedrooms below. Like many a loft this one was full of odds and sods considered to deserve residing in a place even more remote from the main living area of the house than those in the room below. The trunk that acted like a Tardis to pack all our clothes when we went on holiday. Some toys that were considered too childish for any of us at that point.

But the treasure I was really in pursuit of were postage stamps. To someone whose pocket money rarely reached his pocket but aspired to be a successful philatelist, this was like finding a new seam in a coalmine. My precious quarry were contained in a cardboard box and were still attached to letters that my Father had written to Mum (but before you ask, I never read any of them). They were of zero interest at that stage of life, and even if they still existed when we cleared Mum's loft a couple of years ago I would not have intruded into their privacy. It's enough to remember that Dad was assiduous in bearing romantic gifts on birthdays and Valentine's Day.

So the loft, despite being the most above ground space in the family home served as a mine as far as I was concerned, a place where things might be found or stashed. It was not a place to set up camp.

So how about the cellar? Well strictly speaking it was what you call a half cellar in that it's footprint was only half that of the ground floor. Half was another mini mine, where, as ridiculously dangerous as it was, I once in a while did

make my way with an unshielded candle in one hand as I tried to crawl on all threes.

The more conventional cellar had its own attractions. You could limbo dance through a space under a sink into an outside shaft. This became very handy to know when the door was locked and you had to get in undetected. There was a rather basic downstairs loo, a main area for bikes, fishing tackle, wellies and other outdoorsy kinds of things. Best of all was a smaller room which really was quite interesting; because my older brother kept his chemistry set in there as well as his own arms stash (illicitly retained bangers and other fireworks). But because my older brother is wiser and more sensible than me, these were kept in a metal biscuit tin. The other principal purpose of this room was to keep any tools. So, all in all a rather exciting room this one.

Next door was where the coal used to be dumped through a shaft that was now bricked up. For some reason or other this room was always damp with a small puddle at one end. This proved particularly attractive to amphibians, frogs I think or perhaps toads (biology was not a strong point). Anyhow there must have been enough woodlice and the like to provide ready meals because these creatures were often to be found lurking in the corner.

Almost 800 words in (788 to be precise), and I don't know whether you've noticed but I haven't mentioned anything spiritual or theological at all. So, let me take you back to the gospel telling of the Transfiguration. This took place, we have to assume, because Matthew tells us so, "up a high mountain". Jesus had taken three of his companions for a bit of 'us time'. It was a withdrawal from the everyday places of commerce, preaching, miracle working and joshing with the Pharisees. Then, when four became six, Peter was so delighted that he proposed a permanent settlement. Once again 'impetuous Peter' had allowed his enthusiasm to get the better of him. In other company he would have been rebuked or teased; but on this occasion Jesus probably recognised that standing alongside two Old Testament heroes was likely to elicit excitement.

Ultimately there was no avoiding a return to normality, if you can dare to call being in the company of Jesus normal. Certainly, his destiny beckoned; and here's the rub. Peter and the other disciples had been granted a privileged moment in a place set apart from the ordinary to witness something out of the ordinary. Indeed, they were sworn to secrecy, and so denied even the kudos of letting the other disciples or any one else for that matter know what they had experienced.

The loft and the cellar in our home held a similar attraction for me. They were places where I would go, but the things I did were best not spoken about. But they haven't been forgotten as you can see. But perhaps they also provided a

foretaste of the joy and adventure to be discovered in solitude, detachment, independent thinking and imagination.

Of course, grown-ups with imaginations know how to make good use of these kinds of places. Be it the writer's garret, the painter's studio (atelier), the crafter's workshop or the potting shed. Places on the periphery that perform a vital task of offering space for the kind of solitary creativity and reflective thinking that takes time to come to fruition. Such places have a half in half out relationship with the ordinary domestic spaces, but it is one to be cherished, and is cherished at least by their occupants.

So, if you are lucky enough to have such places, be grateful, keep some of it to yourself of course, but don't be selfish, share the things that bring joy to your life; pass on the things you make, or grow or write, who knows what fruit they might bear.

### **Hymn Verse**

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome, in this place.

(Marty Haugen © GIA Publications)

### **Blessing Prayer**

We bless the hidden,  
private places in our home,  
places set aside and respected  
for creativity, self-expression,  
solitude and reflection.

Even if we do not have specific areas for these activities

We pray a blessing that will encourage us to be mindful

Of those with whom we share our home.

Support them in the things that bring pleasure,

Relaxation and artistry to fruition.

Amen.

ARTWORKS

Figure 1. Charles-Paget-Wade-The-Attic-Stairs-at-Elmsley-Yoxford



Figures 2 and 3. Corrie Ten Boom shows where her family his Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Teenage Diarist Anne Frank who also had to hide.



Figure 4. JOHN-FREDERICK-LEWIS-THE-CELLARS-AT-5-GREAT-NEWPORT-STREET



Figure 5. Henri Matisse- *L'Atelier Rose*



Figure 6. Arthur-Segal-A-Garden-Scene-a-Figure-in-a-Shed



## ARTWORK NOTES

A different approach to previously here. Each of the images is paired with a quote from the French Phenomenologist and Philosopher **Gaston Bachelard** whose most influential work ***The Poetics of Space*** discussed and analysed our relationship with intimate places, principally domestic dwellings. Returning to this book over fifteen years after first reading it and not being too sure if I made head nor tail out of it, it's surprising to discover how my own thoughts may have been subliminally influenced. Particularly the childhood recollections above, which appear to live up to Bachelard's prediction when he wrote: *So, like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.*

Then, considering an increasing appreciation of poetry it is easy to concur when he writes that: *Poetry is one of the destinies of speech... One would say that the poetic image, in its newness, opens a future to language.*

See what thought, memories and ideas these images and Bachelard's words conjure up in your mind:

Figure 1. **The Attic Stairs at Elmsley, Yoxford** - Charles Paget Wade

*"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."*

Figures 2 and 3. **Corrie Ten Boom** shows where her family hid Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Teenage diarist **Anne Frank** who also had to hide.

*"If the child is unhappy, however, the house bears traces of his distress. In this connection, I recall that Françoise Minkowska organized an unusually moving exhibition of drawings by Polish and Jewish children who had suffered the cruelties of the German occupation during the last war. One child, who had been hidden in a closet every time there was an alert, continued to draw narrow, cold, closed houses long after those evil times were over."*

Figure 4. **The Cellars at 5 Great Newport Street** – John Frederick Lewis

*"A creature that hides and "withdraws into its shell," is preparing a "way out." This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being."*

Figure 5. **L'Atelier Rose** - Henri Matisse

*"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."*

Figure 6. **A Garden Scene a Figure in a Shed** – Arthur Segal

*"And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired, and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic. We return to them in our night dreams. These retreats have the value of a shell." The Poetics of Space*

## **CRAFTY KIDS**

As this goes to press my sense of responsibility prevents me from suggesting that any children climb up ladders or crawl in tight spaces. Such limitations seem to have acted as a constraint on all ideas for the time being, but who knows; children are probably, almost

certainly exercising the same degree of experimental autonomy and ingenuity; and that in most instances must make their lives more interesting, don't you think?