

“God’s Christmas Tent”
(John 1:14)
Tuesday, December 25th: Christmas Day
Pastor Espinosa

Text: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Merry Christmas! If you’ve ever been camping, have you ever noticed how close you’ve gotta be with the people you’re camping with? All vanity is thrown to the wind! You get up in the morning and the friends you’re with will see you at your absolute worst! Most of the time, you don’t even have a chance to look into a mirror before you step out of the tent and your friends see your hair in total disarray and who knows what the rest of your face looks like! You eat, sleep, work, play and do everything else in close proximity...so much for pride and dignity!

When you go camping, when you go *tenting*, you start to really and truly relate to the people you’re with. You realize that all people get cold, all people get embarrassed, all people laugh, all people get worried (especially if you’ve realized you’ve forgotten toilet paper), all people get excited, all people look kinda funny when they get out of their tent first thing in the morning and all people share a lot more in common than we realize. But it is a very good way to bond and to grow closer and again, to relate, *to be like a family and to be close. Tenting really makes you grow close and see all that you have in common! Tenting makes you join one another, sharing each other’s space and sharing each other’s lives.*

In John 1:14, the original word that the ESV translates as “dwelt” may also be properly translated as “tented”. Thus, the verse could very easily read like this: *“And the Word became flesh and tented among us, and we have seen his glory...”*. The Word – Jesus Christ – “tented” among us. It takes us back to the Old Testament when the people of Israel were so close to the Lord, because He literally traveled with them through the desert in the elaborate and beautiful tabernacle that was in truth a great tent! God was camping with the Israelites. The cloud of His presence was constantly over the tabernacle and on some occasions, the Lord Himself met the high priest in the Holy of Holies within that great tent. God joined His people in a wonderfully intimate way.

But as intimate as this was, there was still a distinct separation going on. There was need for a mediator like the high priest to stand between the Lord and His people. When Jesus was born, however, all of that changed. God no longer appeared in a cloud or a pillar of fire or within an exclusive Holy of Holies, now God got even closer...He actually *joined us...He tented among us by taking on the very flesh that we live and breath in! He tented among us by becoming one of us and as He was just like us, He began His journey as a little baby in order to perfectly relate to us...to relate to you...He tented with you and tents with you today!*

This is what makes Christmas so wonderfully special! Christmas is the celebration of the day when God began to tent with you and me in the most close and intimate and personal way possible!

But before I elaborate, let me state this warning: Our sinful nature constantly tries to put down this truth. There is something about the ordinary, the regular, and the body that we resent. It can seem so plain, so monotonous, so unimpressive, and so inadequate. We see ourselves aging, we so easily see our weaknesses and so quickly

understand our limitations. “Surely,” we think to ourselves, “God is above all of *this!*” I was reading in a book on the philosophy of religion an interesting opinion on how our religion can seem so inadequate. It claimed that we try to express in the form of doctrine and teaching what is so far above us...God is so far removed...He is so much greater and so much mightier, who are we to assume that we can in any way relate to Him?!

Now I am *not* saying that God’s *isn’t* infinitely greater than we are, of course He is, but when we sinfully treat the Lord as if by virtue of His greatness and His “otherness” that He must stay outside our lives, we make a grave and sinful mistake. We are wrong when we assume that what is revealed in the Word is unreasonable...and that the Lord is not as close to us as the Bible says He is.

But know this: This is how our flesh wants it. We want the Lord to be close, *but not too close*. We complain of our limitations well enough, but if we can keep God way over us then we will have a free conscience about keeping Him out of the rest of our lives...we will not therefore feel compelled to pray to Him about the daily grind, the ordinary things, the basic needs...why should we? He can’t really relate...we’re little, He’s big; we’re weak, He’s strong; we’re finite, He’s infinite...why should we really treat Him as if He were actually like one of us?! That would be ludicrous.

If I did not maintain my sinful separation, then I’d have to actually treat the Lord as if I were tenting with Him and He with me...but who wants to tent with God? Then God would have to see how I look when I get up first thing in the morning, and then God would see me as I really am! And I’m not sure I really want Him to be *that* close! And it is for this reason that pride is the main characteristic of our sin...we would hold onto our vanity and avoid camping out with God like the plauge. But just as it is true that folks who don’t go

camping don’t realize the fun their missing, it is also true that those who keep the Lord at arm’s length, don’t realize the life -- indeed the only lasting and good life -- they’re rejecting.

The Lord does not want you to avoid Him, but He wants you to know just how much He would love for you to know that tenting with you would be His pleasure and delight, not to embarrass you, not to condemn you, but to show that it is the only way for Him to save you. He *must* tent with you. He must be just like you. He must come down to your level. He must join your daily life. He cares about the most simple and routine aspects of your life to the extent that not a single hair on your head falls without His knowledge of it, not a single tear is shed without His heart going out to you, not a single thought is considered unimportant...and nothing about your weakness and limitation keeps Him from being glad to come to you.

But how dare we go on like this?! How can we possibly know these things? We know this because of Christmas. God wants to smash the myth that He is far removed. He desires to obliterate the claim that He cannot relate! Instead, He says this day: “Much to the contrary, I desire to tent with you, to be one with you, to treat you as my family, my best friend, my brother, my sister, and I want to know you just as you are, and even more, I have willed to be just as you are!” This is what God accomplished on that first Christmas: He became like you, He took on the permanent status of knowing what it is like to tent with you!

To complement what John 1:14 teaches is what is recorded in the letter to the Hebrews describing just how well the Lord knows you and relates to you since He entered our human tents and dressed Himself with human flesh born on Christmas Day: **“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect...For we do not**

have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 2:17a-4:15-16)."

Christmas is God's way of saying, "I have joined you, because my Son became just like you; because He tented with you in the flesh!" God and man are one in Christ and as you hold to this baby born on Christmas Day, God relates to every aspect of your life, He understands, He knows, He sympathizes and He relates...and in relating as He did, Christ became utterly convinced of something: He was convinced that to tent with you meant that He would be willing to do anything for you to save you. When you get that close, you don't want to ever let go!

Thus, He was unwilling to allow you to lose hope. He was unwilling to allow you to perish, and He was unwilling to allow you who shared His tent to die in your sins. So because of His great love while being just like you, He paid the ultimate price for His friends/His tent-mates: He died for you, shed His blood for you, took the punishment for the sin of keeping God out and all other sins. And when He rose the third day He proved just how worthwhile it was to begin tenting with you on Christmas morning. It was worth it, because through His glorious resurrection, it is a tenting that has become glorious!

Yes the baby grew up and your Savior to this day bears the marks of His love for tenting. In heaven we will see the marks on His hands and on His feet: the proof of His love for tenting with you, for being one with you, for sharing every part of your life. Like the poinsettia's that adorn our church, they are like a star in the middle surrounded

with red that reminds us of what this child would do: His birth marked by the Star of Bethlehem ushered Him into our tent, so that by taking our flesh He could shed His royal blood for us and then share with us the spoils of His victory over sin and death. Now on this new Christmas morning, you are within His tent of the Church -- esp. this particular church as we are quite literally in a hard-shell tent -- and here through His Word and Sacrament Christ is with us still, keeping us covered in His forgiveness and His gift of eternal life. It is a Happy Christmas! We tent with Christ who tented with us!