

Transfiguration C, 2010

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Title: Tents

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I like tents. I think they're fun. I can still remember setting up a dome tent for the first time, marveling over the shock-corded poles, the stakes, the rain fly and the nylon tent itself, how everything fit together. It's amazing that a structure that can sleep three people can fit into such a small, compact bag. I got my first tent for Christmas, and I remember setting it up in the back yard and sleeping out in the cold.

To me, sleeping in a cabin or a camper really isn't camping. To get the full experience, it needs to be a tent.

Peter liked tents, too. When he saw what was happening on the mount of transfiguration, he wanted to set up three tents- one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

There's a reason why Peter wanted to start setting up tents. It's not that Peter wants to have a camp-out. There's more to it than that.

In the Old Testament, God used a tent. For a long time, God dwelt with his people in a tent. If you wanted to find God, or if you wanted to meet with God, you went to God's tent.

Now sometimes you hear it called by a fancy name, "The Tabernacle." But don't let that fancy name fool you. This was a tent. It had poles, it had fabric, you could set it up and take it down and move it with you. It was a tent.

It was also called the "tent of meeting" because this is where God met with His people- in the tent. If you're looking for God, go find His tent.

Moses received the plans for making the tent when he was on Mt. Sinai. He didn't just receive the Ten Commandments up there, but he also received detailed instruction on how to build this tent. And the last third of the book of Exodus contains all these blue-prints for exactly how the tent was to be made.

The tent was a good thing. You see, the Israelites were on the move. They were between Egypt and the Promised Land. They were never in one place for very long. A temple would have been useless, because they were on move. You can't take a temple with you.

But why did God use a tent at all? Why couldn't He come down and meet with His people directly?

The tent was a good thing. If God had met with the people face to face, they would not be able to stand it. Remember last week, when Isaiah saw the Lord? He was afraid. He was sure that He was going to die.

The tent was a good thing, in that it kept the people from experiencing the full-blast God.

So when Peter meets God in all His glory in the person of Jesus Christ, it's a scary thing. It would be like staring directly into the high beam headlights of your car. That's how bright and dazzling it would have been.

Peter knows that this is a good thing, but He wants to build a tent to put Him in.

Moses and Elijah had come down from heaven, and they too radiate the glory of God. It's probably a good thing to put them in tents, too.

Instead of a tent, though, God sent a cloud. The cloud is another way God veils His presence to protect His people. This is the same cloud that led the people Israel through the wilderness. This is the same cloud that settled over the Tabernacle (for more on that, read Exodus 40 for your devotions tonight). This is the same cloud that filled the Temple (that story is in 1 Kings 8). This is the same cloud that later hid Jesus from their sight at the ascension.

In the Bible, when you see a cloud, it doesn't mean that it's going to rain. It means that God is there.

God loves us, and knows that we can't handle Him full blast and live. So God hides Himself. He hid Himself in the tent and in the cloud in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, God hides Himself in human flesh. Jesus' body is the new tent, the new tabernacle.

We can't handle God face-to-face, and so He hides himself in Jesus.

On the mount of Transfiguration, the disciples get a quick peak into the tent. They see what is hiding behind Jesus' flesh. His face is shining, and so are His clothes. It's not that the clothes changed, but Jesus' flesh, under the clothes, shone forth and made them shining and brilliant.

Peter doesn't know what to say. He wants to capture the glory of Jesus in another tent. But there is no need. It's the same Jesus, shining or not.

Today, God still hides Himself. God doesn't come at us full blast, because he knows we are sinful. Just like Isaiah and Peter from last week, we would be consumed by fear. But God hides himself for our good.

God doesn't use the same tent as He did in the Old Testament. Instead God hides Himself among us in His Word and in His Sacraments. God is not present in the trees or the mountains or the sunset. These bear witness to His power and His glory. But these are not His tents. If you want to find God, look for His tent.

God's presence is with us through Jesus' words. What did God say to the disciples, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!" It's in Jesus' Words that He's present with us today. God takes those words and hides them in tents.

When Jesus was on earth, the words were in the tent of His flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God used the tent of Jesus' body.

Today, God uses the tent of human words. If you could peak underneath the tent of the human voice you hear in the words of Holy Absolution and the reading of the Holy Gospel, you would find Jesus there, in that tent.

God uses the tent of water. If you could peak underneath the tent of the water in Holy Baptism, you would find Jesus there, in that tent.

God uses the tent of bread and wine. If you could peak underneath the tent of the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper, you would find Jesus there, in that tent.

Finally, Jesus uses you as His tent. Jesus hides himself in your very flesh and blood. His word comes in through your ears, in through your forehead, in through your mouth and dwells in you. Your body is Jesus' tent. Jesus now dwells in you.

Tents are not permanent structures. They wear out and need constant maintenance and repair.

The tent of your body is no different. It will wear out. It will fray and tear. Just look at Jesus.

On Wednesday night we begin our journey from the mount of transfiguration to mount Calvary. There the tent of Jesus' body will be ripped and torn and hang in shreds on the cross.

But even though the tent was destroyed, it was not the end of Jesus. Three days later, the tent was back up. You could still see a few places where it had been torn, but Jesus was alive, never to die again.

One day your tent will collapse. The wear and tear on it will be too much, and it will not survive the strain.

But that will not be the end of you. The Lord will rebuild your tent in a better way, to look like Jesus' new tent.