

GOD GOES TENTING

2 Peter 1:12–21

^{1:12} Therefore, I intend to remind you constantly of these things even though you know them and are well established in the truth that you now have. ^{1:13} Indeed, as long as I am in this tabernacle,⁴⁴ I consider it right to stir you up by way of a reminder, ^{1:14} since I know that my tabernacle will soon be removed, because our Lord Jesus Christ revealed this to me. ^{1:15} Indeed, I will also make every effort that, after my departure, you have a testimony of these things.

Apparently camping holidays are booming in Australia. More and more people are opting for tents or campertrailers to 'go see Australia'.

It may seem strange, but God likes camping, too!

It began with the tabernacle.

'Tabernacle' is another word for 'tent'; but it has the special sense of the 'tent where God meets with people'.

During the forty years wandering in the wilderness – the Exodus – God was present with his people in his tabernacle. For God, those forty years were like one great big family camping holiday – the people in their family tents, and he in his (Ezekiel 20; 2 Samuel 7).

The thing is, God still likes camping.

But his tabernacle has changed.

St John tells us in his Gospel, in Chapter 1, that the word of God 'tented among us' (John 1:14). The usual translation is "dwelt" or "lived" among us. But "tented" is the more literal term. Jesus was the Son of God who took on human flesh; and he wore his humanity like living in a tent.

At the transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw Jesus without the 'tent' for a little while.

Jesus, while he lived on earth, was God's "tabernacle". Far more so than the temple in Jerusalem.

So here's a thought:

At the transfiguration, who changed?

Laurel A. Dykstra, a scripture and justice educator living in Vancouver, British Columbia, wrote the following in an article for Sojourners Magazine:

"My first night at Guadalupe House, a Catholic Worker "transition house" where I spent nearly 10 years, I sat at the wobbly-legged table amid a circle of men's faces, black and brown and white, and looked at the peeling linoleum, tattered sheer yellow curtains, broken couches, and roach-filled corners. I had never seen a place so ugly. After a week of

hospitality, laughter, community, and connection, I sat in the same seat and caught myself thinking, 'What a kind and homey room this is.' Transfigured.

"So I wonder: In Matthew's story of the mountain, was it Jesus who changed or was it that John, James, and Peter could now see the face of God shining in the man they knew? Did the thin air and the elevated perspective contribute to their clarity of vision? When they came down from the mountaintop, did they take their new capacity to see into the low places and crowded city streets? Can we? And when we see the face of God shining through those who are familiar to us, do we truly, deeply listen to them?"

God made his dwelling among people – tented – in Jesus of Nazareth. And for those who were willing to go tenting with him it was life changing. Fisherman and farmers, tax collectors and rebels, tradies and teachers became his disciples; and in following him, also became his ambassadors.

But the tabernacle changed again after Jesus rose from the dead.

¹⁶Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. [1 Corinthians 3:16-17, TNIV]

We are his tent – the place where he dwells on earth. St Paul usually uses 'body of Christ' imagery for this.

Which brings us around to what St Peter wrote in 2 Peter: *Indeed, as long as I am in this tabernacle, I consider it right to stir you up by way of a reminder.*

And what does he remind his readers of?

Of when he saw Jesus out of his tent!

^{1:16}For we did not follow cleverly concocted fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; no, we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur. ^{1:17}For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory: "This is my dear Son, in whom I am delighted." ^{1:18}When this voice was conveyed from heaven, we ourselves heard it, for we were with him on the holy mountain. [NET]

It's significant that St Peter is reflecting on this event while he is thinking of his own tent, and how soon he will be out of it.

He caught a glimpse of what it meant to finally be 'out of the tent' when he saw Jesus transfigured. And now he knows he can look forward to the same liberating glorious freedom.

St Paul wrote much the same sort of thing:

¹For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [2 Corinthians 5:1,4, TNIV]

God likes tenting holidays – but only because it means he is bringing us home.

So, we know where we are going.

The question now is: How are we travelling?

In a way, we are like those people who do bike rides around Australia, or car rallies or the like, in order to raise funds for a charity.

We are God's nomads – grey or otherwise – raising interest in the Kingdom of God.

What it means, then, to be God's 'tabernacle' is that we are each places where people meet with God.

Now, that sounds weird, but what it means is that Christians are the ones who bring Christ to other people. We are all ambassadors of our Lord and Saviour.

We have these messages from our King: “You are forgiven. Believe in me and you will be saved. Trust in me, and I will heal you and rescue you from all evils, even from death itself. Learn of God's love you, and so love one another.”

And that's just some of the messages.

But at heart the message is: “Come to me, and belong in my country.”

I guess that makes us immigration department workers.

Or, even more accurately, ‘boat people’ carers and supporters.

While we each live in our own 'tents' we are called on by our King to encourage as many people as possible to apply for immigration into our king's country.

And, of course, the wonderful job we have is that the only 'qualification' for entering the King's country – for citizenship – is simply to accept his invitation to come in, to trust in the King's love and mercy.

Mind you, as nomads who are on a camping holiday (holy-day) with God, we still need a good road map.

So St Peter reminds us:

1:19 Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ^{1:20} Above all, you do well if you recognize this: no prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, ^{1:21} for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

God's Word is our road map. But it isn't so much about a 'how to' or 'where to' type guide, as about a 'who loves you' and 'how you are loved' guide.

St Peter wrote his letter to Christians who were persecuted for their witness of Jesus. So he tells them (and us!):

³ *As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness!* ⁴ *And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in his divine nature.*

⁵ *So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better.* ⁶ *Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness.* ⁷ *Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone.* ⁸ *The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NLT. 1997. Wheaton: Tyndale House.)*

- know Jesus better..... receive his mighty power
- receive his mighty power..... receive all his promises
- receive all his promises..... apply their benefits in your life
- apply their benefits know God better
- know God better self-control
- self-control patient endurance
- patient endurance..... godliness (being like God)
- godliness love for fellow Christians
- love for fellow Christians..... love for everyone

Does this scheme sound true to you?

And the end of it all is not a seemingly aimless and homeless wandering around, but heaven itself!

¹⁰ *So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Doing this, you will never stumble or fall away.* ¹¹ *And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

[NET]

Amen.