

June 28, 2009
Pentecost 4

"Living in a Tent"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

Now 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. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For 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. ⁵ Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Why was there a tent pitched out in front of our church this morning with different camping gear? Did someone decide to camp out here last night? Did someone have to move out of their home? Is someone planning to borrow the camping gear for a camping trip? Or is it possible the pastor set up the tent to serve as an object lesson for our sermon this morning? You know the right answer to this question, especially if you listened carefully to the words just read to you where Paul speaks about leaving our earthly tent of this life and going to the permanent place Jesus has prepared for us.

If you have ever done some serious camping, you know how good it feels to come home, take a warm shower, sleep in a real bed, and prepare a meal with all the conveniences of our modern kitchens. Students will spend a whole summer traveling through Europe with only a backpack such as this to carry all their clothes and possessions for eight or ten weeks. It is exciting but it does get old after a while, especially if you try to see Europe on five dollars a day as we did in the early '70's.

Paul knew a lot about tents. In fact he could support himself by weaving tents for people most likely out of goat hair. These tents provided temporary shelters for people as they traveled from place to place or until they could get into a real home. This morning we want to think about this life as living in tent with heaven as our real home.

1) We long for our real home above

Paul speaks about the place he had waiting for him after this life as a very real place. "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, not built by human hands." He says, "We know." Even though Paul's eyes have not seen the blessings of heaven, or his body has not yet been raised from the dead, he knows it is there and it is real because the Lord promised it. Our lives

on this earth are like living in a tent because tents don't last. Gradually with time, the tent begins to tear at the seams and fall apart. There was a time when your life was so strong and vibrant, even the strongest storms could howl and you could weather the storms. Now your life is so fragile, the least little problem comes and you find yourself running to the doctor for help. Ultimately each of our lives will fall apart with time, like an old tent. Listen to these words of Ecclesiastes 12: "...when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint." Growing old does is not so bad if we know that we have a permanent house waiting for us in heaven.

The place Jesus prepares for us has not been made by human hands. "We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not made with human hands." Everything made by human hands has some flaws and imperfections in it. The place Jesus has for us will be without any flaws or imperfections. Hebrews 11 says of Abraham, "He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder was God." One of the joys of camping is to look up into the sky and see the beauty of the stars that God has made, but they cannot compare to the permanent waiting for us. As one little girl told her dad as she looked up at the stars, "Just think Daddy, it this is how pretty heaven is on this side, just think of what it must be like on the other side."

Because we know this place really exists and the present life is so uncertain we eagerly long to experience what is waiting for us. The Apostle writes, "Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked." The word for "naked" has the thought of not having enough clothes to wear. If you have ever camped when it gets really cold at night, you are so happy to put on the extra clothes you brought along. You may even crawl into the sleeping bag to get warm. Without these extra clothes you will shiver through the night. Imagine living in a tent when it rains, and when the wind blows, and when it is cold at night. Under such circumstances you groan about being in a dry bed with a warm, down comforter.

If you are around Christians, you will hear them groaning and sighing. It is not because their stomach is hungry for food. In every heart, even among the heathen, there is an ache and longing for what life was once like in the original Garden of Eden. Ecclesiastes tells us that God has put eternity in our hearts. There is a God-given hunger for a better place in all of humanity. Steven Spielberg captured this thought of longing to go home in the popular movie, *E.T.* ET loved his new friends, especially his companion Elliot, but he still wanted to go home. You remember the tear producing words from the aching heart of the beloved ET: "ET go home."

The longing we have is not based on some fantasy or dream which can never be fulfilled. Paul tells us our hope is based on mortality being swallowed up by life: "What is mortal may be swallowed up by life." The word for "swallow up" comes from the Greek word for "drink." A prefix is added to the word to intensify it. In English we use the word "drink" and the word "gulp." The same word is used by Jesus to describe swallowing a camel. It is used in Hebrews to describe how the army of Pharaoh was swallowed by the waters of the Red Sea. 1 Corinthians 15 says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." When a Christian dies, it appears that death is swallowing another victim, the way a great white

shark might tear into a helpless seal pup. The shark of death does not know the little seal pup has within its fragile life the explosive power of Jesus' resurrection, a power that blow up death and scatters its body parts on the waves of the ocean. When you die in Jesus you swallow up death. Death does not swallow you.

This hope of our permanent home with Jesus beats inside by the power of the Holy Spirit similar to how our heart beats blood through out our bodies. Our text says, "Now it is God who has made us for this purpose and has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

God has given us his Holy Spirit. Before becoming a Christian, I might believe in the existence of God, but I certainly don't know about the place the Lord has prepared for me, or even how to get there. Before the Holy Spirit's work in my life, I will live under the delusion that the good I try to do in this life, will add up like money in a bank account, to give me a better place after I die. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, I come to realize how far I fall short of God's glory, and how much I need what Christ Jesus did for me at the cross to cancel the debt and give me eternal life as a free gift. Before the work of the Holy Spirit, heaven appears as a very boring place, but after the work of the Holy Spirit, I realize that even the best moments of this life condensed into pure joy, will not even begin to approximate one second of eternity with the Lord. Paul compares this blessing of the Holy Spirit to a deposit or down payment guaranteeing what is to come. Just as a down payment says more money is on the way, the Holy Spirit says more is to come.

Camping can be tough when it rains and the tent leaks, or the air mattress losses its air in the middle of the night, or bears invade the campground and keep you awake at night. Always there are the joys of mountain meadows, snowfields, waterfalls, gurgling streams, the campfires and the roasted marshmallows. Our lives in this old tent are filled with joyful opportunities to serve the Lord that are so beautiful to the Lord and to us.

2) We treasure the time on this earth

Paul tells us that he wants to go home and leave this body or this tent. At the same time he has confidence that the Lord has a definite plan and purpose for his life on this earth. He writes, "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. "Therefore we are always confident...." He is always confident of the Lord's will in his life. We live by faith and not by sight. We know that God has a purpose for us in life, even if this is not our real home.

How can we be sure of God's plan for our lives? Look back at the life of Abraham. He wandered in the land of Canaan, going from place to place, living in tents, instead of living in a permanent home provided by the Lord. Wherever Abraham went it says, "He dug a well, built an altar and called on the name of the Lord." When strangers came to his tent he was eager to serve them the best meal he could, but not without hoping and praying for an opportunity to tell them about a righteousness God has planned for them in a future Savior. God's plan for your life and mine is clearly set forth on the pages of the Bible. While

we camp on this earth, Jesus said we are "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." Our text says that our purpose and goal in life is to please him. It is our duty in life to bring honor to God, to love what God loves and hate what God hates. In Philippians Paul shared with us his joyful dilemma: "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. " Our lives here on this earth are caught up with the progress of the gospel. That is why we pray "Thy kingdom come." We long for the joy of seeing other people come into the kingdom of heaven.

Some day we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one will receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." We are saved by the merits of Christ. We are not saved by our works, yet our works will be judged on the last day. They will be considered worthy and valuable for the sake of Christ. We will see the benefit of having lived for Christ and the beauty of having glorified his name, even when we had to suffer in this old tent of this life. You have heard the expression, "He is not a happy camper." That's not true of your life. You are living in a tent, yet you are a happy camper, because you know the home which is waiting for you, and you know the value of each moment lived in this life as a way to glorify the Lord. Amen.