

“The One We’ve All Been Waiting For”

John 1:1-18

Series: The Story Chapter 22 The Birth of the King

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Paradise for me is a sky blue lake tucked among the giants of the Adirondacks. Cranberry Lake is its quaint little name. My grandparents found it by accident in the 40's. My father took us there on purpose in the 60's for a week in a tent. Some of my fondest memories of childhood return to me from those shores. The mournful cry of the loons, the fragrant pine forests, the mountain trails that literally take your breath away as you scramble up their steep ascent. In my mind I can still see my feet on the bottom of the clear lake and feel the mud squish between my toes. I remember a twilight when the sky blazed with fire. And I will never forget the hour my brother and I spent huddled next to my Dad under a tarp, on a boulder, by the shore, as we waited for the lightning and rain to stop interrupting our fishing trip. Twenty-five years later I completed the circle when I took my family to Cranberry Lake. We rolled up our jeans and waded in the water, climbed Bear Mountain to look for the edge of the world, and yes, when the rod was flung and the reel spun, the thunder began to roll.

It's funny how campers tend to remember all the wonderful adventures of the outdoors and screen out the times it poured. I read an article once by Bob Welch entitled, "The Joy of Camping: A look at smoky campfires and air mattresses that go flat in the night." After years of sitting under the drip of rain on a plastic tarp, Bob Welch wondered, "Why do we go camping?"

Like my parents before me and my father's parents before him, we are woven together by some inexplicable desire to get smoke in our eyes, sit on fishing lures and offer ourselves as human sacrifices to tribes of bloodthirsty mosquitoes. Why? It's tough to answer that question when it's 5 a.m. and you're the only one in the tent not asleep, a tree root poking between your shoulders and some guy three campsites away is snoring as if he were a chain saw with a worn out carburetor. Why give up microwaves ovens and soft mattresses for outhouses that are too far away when you need one and too close when you don't? Why use nearly as much blood, sweat and tears putting up a 12 foot nylon tent as the Egyptians used in building the pyramids?

Why do we camp? Because it brings us face to face, not only as tent sardines, but as human beings. At home, too often we gather around the TV, each of us reacting to the tube, not each other. High in the mountains, we might start out the evening laughing about a squirrel and wind up talking about the Sermon on the Mount. When you're camping you appreciate things easily taken for granted at home. It isn't important that we have the perfect experiences while camping. What matter is that we spend time communicating with each other, communicating with God and enjoying this amazing creation of His called earth."

You may wonder why I speak about camping when our topic in the Story is the birth of Jesus? What do tents have to do with Christmas or, for that matter, God? Well perhaps you missed the fact that the Lord loves to go camping. If you read The Story carefully you will often

find God is in a tent. When God selected Abraham to be the father of his chosen people, He paid a visit to the tent of the old patriarch. While Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness for forty years, the Lord descended to the "Tabernacle" or "Tent of Meeting." In the center of the sprawling encampment, Moses pitched the tent that housed the stone tablets of the Law and the Ark of the Covenant. As Moses passed through the tent flap, the pillar of cloud, the symbol of God's presence, descended upon the Tent of Meeting. Every Israelite man, woman and child stood at the door of their family tent and worshiped. In the Tent of Meeting, Moses brought questions to the Lord and the Lord issued His directions.

As Bob Welch wrote, in a tent you come face to face, you are able to communicate one on one. Moses communed with the Lord there. No one else, however, was permitted near the Tent of Meeting. Why? Because God is holy and pure. He is not merely opposed to sin. His very presence destroys it. As fire consumes garbage, as bleach wipes away mold, as light casts out darkness so God cannot abide, cannot coexist with sin. The people in the Bible are always afraid to behold the intense, burning glory of God. For no one can see God and live. The Lord called and cleansed Moses so that he could be the mediator, the mouth piece for the Lord. Yet even Moses didn't see God directly.

What many call the "wrath of God," what many describe as an angry Old Testament God is in reality, the Lord's total righteous opposition to evil and sin in all its forms. We are the ones who drove this wedge in our relationship with God. Our sin caused this separation, this breakdown of fellowship. It was for our protection that God kept his distance from us. To touch God meant certain annihilation. So he gave Moses the Tent of Meeting as the first point of contact. Then, in Solomon's day, the goat skin Tabernacle of nomads became a glorious stone Temple in Jerusalem. Even within the Temple, though, a massive curtain of fabric, like the Tent of old, separated the people and the priests from the holiest of holy places, the resting place of the Ark, the dwelling place of God's glory.

It was not God's desire to live in a temple forever. It was not God's intent to dwell in a tent for all time. All that time the Lord longed to be reconciled with us, to take away the separation, to wipe away the sin without wiping us out. So God embarked on a new and surprising type of camping trip. He left his heavenly home and took up residence in a new tent - a tent not made of goat skins or canvas but of flesh.

The Apostle John witnessed all this. He begins his version of the Story at the beginning, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1-2)

As we learned from Matthew's genealogy last week, John wants to connect what we call the Old and New Testaments. The Story, he writes, is one continuous story. So John returns to the very beginning of the Bible: Genesis 1:1. He tells us what happened before Time and Space began.

He reveals something we didn't know: **The Word Was With God the Father.** John calls God the Son "The Word." Why? In Greek the word for the Word is Logos. We get our word "logo," "logic" and words like "bio-logy" from Logos. It's the word for Reason. Greek philosophers taught when God created the cosmos He used reason. In the same way, the

Hebrews wrote, in the Old Testament, that God used wisdom to create the universe. Today scientists tell us there are reasonable, testable, mathematical formulas such as $E=mc^2$ and Newton's laws of motion which govern the universe. John affirms all this and then takes it one step farther: He states the Word is not an idea, not a wise saying, not a scientific formula but a Person. He also points out that the Word is not a new god, a second god or an angel. He is not created by God the Father. He was there before creation began. He is with God the Father, equal to God the Father and yet different from God the Father.

Next John reveals another mystery: **The Word Created With God the Father.**

Through (the Word) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:3-5)

You remember from Genesis 1 how in the darkness "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). With a Word, God speaks and Light shines in the darkness. Yet John tells us this is not just light to guide us through a dark room. This is the Light that will guide us through the torturous darkness of our lives. This is the Light that will guide us to everlasting life. The Word is the One who created all things and keeps them going. If the law of gravity stopped working, if atomic forces suddenly ceased, the universe would disintegrate. The Apostle Paul, like John, says, "He is before all things and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:17)

Now comes the greatest mystery of all. **The Word Came To Be With Us.**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14)

At this point, John's Greek and Jewish readers were so scandalized they probably threw down the scroll. Greeks and Jews believed Reason or Wisdom might be a person or personal but they refused to believe the Word could come down here, come become human. Greeks thought the human body is a prison. If Jews believed the Temple couldn't contain God's glory how could a human body? John, however, testifies that it happened. He witnessed The Word in the flesh in Jesus. What's more, John tells us He lived in a tent. The literal translation of this verse is: "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us." It's the same word used for the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. This time, in a tent of flesh, God walks among us. God lives on earth not in a shelter of animal skins but in human skin.

It is fitting that a God who loves to dwell in tents should be born outside under the stars instead of under a roof. It is appropriate that the first guests invited to celebrate His birth were shepherds who lived in tents as they kept watch over their flocks by night. Foxes have holes and birds have nests. But it should come as no surprise that the Son of Man had no house in which to lay his head.

Why? Because God's intent was to get close to us, to be reconciled with us, to take away the barrier of sin that stood between Him and us. In the past He spoke through Moses, the mediator. Now He speaks directly, face to face. In the past He gave us the Law. Now He offers grace and truth. In the past His glory was concealed behind the goat skin walls of a tent, behind a thick curtain in the Temple. Now His glory shines inside a human body. John writes,

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (John 1:14, 18)

Jesus taught that the God who appears wrathful in the Old Testament is actually our Everlasting Father. Jesus spoke of a Father who not only knows your name but every hair upon your head, a Father who cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and who will surely take care of you, a Father who runs to welcome home his prodigal sons and daughters with robes flying and arms flung wide, a Father who forgives us even before we ask, a Father who wants to adopt each one of us and make us His children. Jesus came and revealed that God is not an angry, vengeful Deity but a loving Everlasting Father. Yes God is opposed to sin but he is willing to move heaven and earth in order to remove it from us.

And He did. It happened on that dark Friday afternoon when the tent of Jesus' body was nailed with tent stakes to the cross. In that moment the sin that separated us from God entered into God's tent and came between the Father and the Son. There, in the very heart of God, sin was swallowed up. And at the moment of his death, the Temple curtain, that wall of fabric, that barrier of cloth that separated us from God, was ripped in two. Now nothing in all of creation can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Finally, John says, **The Word Came to Be In Us.**

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:9-13)

From the very beginning God's intent was to go from tent, to temple, to flesh, and then to you. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus promised his disciples, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23) You see God's intent is eventually to get inside the tent of your life. The Father and Son want to establish a personal, intimate relationship with you through the Holy Spirit. He wants to share with you this camping expedition we call life. He wants to lead you along your journey.

Pastor Leah Miller from Anchor told me recently how she joined a man named Woody who visits homeless youth right here in Bucks County through a ministry called The Synergy Project. She jumped in his muddy 4X4 Jeep and drove to tent circles hidden in the woods surrounded by suburban sprawl. In the pouring rain Woody brought them ponchos, water, wipes, backpacks, rope and even pizza. Yet the most important gift Woody brings is presence. He sits in their tents and listens to them. Leah told me,

What I appreciate about Woody is he listens to their needs. He asks them questions out of genuine interest in their lives and respects the advice they give about how to help them. When he first began this ministry Woody, his wife, and their baby lived in the woods in a trailer just to reach these kids. He knows what it is like because he entered into the mud of these camps. He isn't afraid to get his boots dirty or his clothes soaked to go seek out those in need. He forms relationships with these youth. He pitches his tent among theirs. Woody shows them they are worthy, loved, and cared for. They are not alone.

Not all the youth accept Woody's help. It doesn't matter. He still offers it.

God the Son entered the world He made and it was a mess. That didn't stop Him. He pitched His tent among ours. Like Woody, He wants to build a relationship with us in our muck, mud and mire. He doesn't force anything on us. He simply offers a way out if we will believe and receive it. When the road you travel is steep and treacherous, He will not let your foot slip. When the path is confusing, when you're lost in the woods and not sure which way to go, He will guide you. When thunder rolls and lightning strikes fear in your heart, when troubles rise to flood levels and threaten to overwhelm you, He will reassure you. Though the companions who once shared your journey are, for one reason or another, no longer there, He will never leave you nor forsake you. When darkness descends and everything once familiar now seems strange, He will be the Light that shines in the darkness. And when the journey of your life is over, when the tent of your mortal body is worn, threadbare and beyond patching, He will invite you to roll it up and come home with Him to His Father's house where a room will be all prepared for you. And you will know, with every fiber of your being, that it was always God's intent to bring you home.

The Word became flesh and His sole intent is to climb inside your tent. Little David was only two years old and sick. So sick in fact that, at that tender age, he several IVs and other medical equipment attached to his little limbs. To make matters worse, he had the croup. Wheezing and hacking, his chest was full of congestion. The best thing was to put him in a croup tent - a plastic pop-up filled with moist air. It was cumbersome and difficult for his mother to get near him. Though it was a pretty miserable place to be, he finally dropped off to sleep. When the new shift of nurses came on, David's mother stepped out for a minute while they took his vitals and made some changes. While in the hall, she heard a loud crash. Running into the room, she saw David wildly thrashing about. He awoke to find himself alone among strangers. The nurses tried everything to calm him but it was impossible. Then David's mother did an unusual thing. She climbed into the croup tent. Taking the little boy in her arms she held him close. He continued to kick his legs and flail his arms. But gradually, the tantrum subsided. With soothing words she comforted him until he fell back asleep. There was no miracle cure. She simply was with him in the croup tent.

Open up your tent and say to Jesus: "Be born in me."