

Sermon for Year C Christmas 1  
Isaiah 61:10-62:3 Galatians 3:32-25,4:4-7 Psalm 147 John 1:1-18  
December 31, 2006  
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC  
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### The Pitched Tent

*And the Word became flesh and pitched a tent among us.*

Now our New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible says,  
*And the Word became flesh and lived among us.*  
But the truth is, a much fuller translation of the Greek is  
“pitched a tent among us.”

For the Word—  
and that Word is clearly Jesus—  
has not come to live as our next-door neighbor  
that we see only occasionally,  
wave to in the drive-way  
and then get in our car and go about our own business.

Nor has the Word come to live among us  
become our good friend  
and then one day stop by and say,  
“I’m moving out to LA. It’s been fun.  
I’ll send you my email when I get out there.”  
And then we never hear from them again.

True, yes, that is sometimes the remote, stand-offish relationship we keep with God.  
But that is not God’s intention;  
certainly not according to the writer of John’s gospel.

A much better understanding of this passage from John  
is to imagine that we are by ourselves,  
on a camping trip in the wilderness.  
And we wake up one morning and there is this tent—right next to ours—close!  
And we don’t see anyone around--  
but the tent shows that someone was there,  
and mysteriously, is still there..

So a few days later,  
we take down our tent and we hike off into the woods again, down the trail,  
and evening comes and we pitch our tent again.

Then we slip inside to unpack a few items,  
and when we come out again,  
just a few minutes later,  
there's that other tent.

The very same one.

And once again, it's pitched right beside ours—right up close.  
Again—and again—and again—it keeps happening.  
Someone keeps pitching their tent among us.

It would be creepy--  
except there is this intuitive, deep sense of wonderful,  
of thanksgiving, about it all.  
Company.  
Companionship.  
Compassion.  
Someone is there,  
traveling every step of the way with us.

*No one has ever seen God.  
It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart,  
who has made God known.*

Pitching a tent and living among us.  
A tent of human flesh.

This is what made the people of Jesus' own day crazy.  
Body and spirit, flesh and holiness—  
they were thought of as completely separate.

Divinity and humanity did not come all rolled into one.  
Divinity and humanity barely held hands,  
Much less...  
Well, you get the idea.

And then here is Jesus.  
Think what people were asked to believe:

*"... that a particular individual, living in a buffer state in the Middle East,  
powerless before a Roman governor, is the One in whom we meet the Creator of  
heaven and earth."<sup>1</sup>*

Absolutely, says John's gospel.  
But these are not isolated data bites.  
John is speaking a much deeper truth here.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cousar, ed., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary based on the NRSV Year C* (Westminster Press, Louisville, KY, 1994) page 64.

It is no surprise that the gospel of John  
was the favorite among the early Celtic Christians.  
The poetry. The imagery. The metaphors.  
The magnificent mystery of it all.

Indeed these early Christian people  
looked to John's gospel,  
and before that to the book of Wisdom in the Old Testament,  
because over and over,  
in beautiful words,  
these holy scriptures affirm  
that God is not far away.  
God is right here.  
Right here among us.

The real distinguishing characteristic of Celtic Christianity  
is the constant awareness  
of God's presence in the midst of activity,  
in the midst of our every day lives.

Divinity is not remote.  
Jesus is not some sort of pie-in-the-sky deity.

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left.*

Just as God was in the beginning,  
God is now.  
Present. Active. Alive. On the move.  
Never far away.

*The Word became flesh and pitched a tent among us.*  
And stayed.  
No matter the condition of our lives.

And we often bemoan that condition.  
Things are not going as we planned.  
Life just isn't "happily ever after."

When we feel quite trampled upon by the world,  
We get tired. We get fed up.  
We retreat because we don't want to be hurt again.  
Or because no one seems to be listening  
or how can anyone possibly understand the pain of our life.

We spin our own little one-size-fits-only-me cocoon,  
and convince ourselves  
that since the world has disappointed us,  
we are not about to pitch our little tent AMONG anyone.  
We are staying right here, shut off from the world,  
staying right here in our illusion of safety,  
in our own little custom cocoon.

Only we need to take a close look at the material of which this cocoon is made.

Often we build the walls between us and the world with substances—  
pick your own poison--  
any substance that make us numb will do.  
Numb to pain, yes  
but numb to those around us as well.  
Numb to life itself.

Sometimes we weave our cocoon by keeping ourselves  
very busy and preoccupied,  
obsessed with our own desires and cravings—  
it's a clever way  
to distract ourselves  
from what God is trying to do in our lives.

Sometimes we fortify our cocoon  
with thick strands of anger and criticism,  
both of others and ourselves.  
Anger is a wonderful way to keep us paralyzed in one place.<sup>2</sup>

But cocoons, however carefully constructed, are not places of safety,  
but places that eventually burst at the seams  
and, if we are lucky, propel us into the world once more.

It's called resurrection.  
We are called to life not death.  
We are called to light not darkness.  
We are called to live among one another.  
to pitch our tent  
and be in relationship with our brothers and sisters--  
and with God.

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<sup>2</sup> These elements which I have used in regards to how we build our cocoon were inspired by a lecture by Pema Chodron in *Getting Unstuck*.

It is not easy.  
I know that.  
You know that.

So here is a resolution for all of us  
for this New Year's Eve morning:  
Resolve to ask for God's help.

We promise we will do that  
in our baptismal covenant.  
All the promises we make are partnered with that phrase:  
*I will, with God's help.*

So ask.  
Ask for God's help with whatever is keeping you trapped.  
Ask for God's help with whatever is making you want to run away.  
Ask for God's help with whatever is making you so angry.  
Ask for God's help with whatever is breaking your heart.  
And ask for God's help to celebrate the joys and blessings of life, too.

Resolve to ask for God's help.

*And the Word became flesh and pitched a tent among us.*

Why else but to hear our cry for help?  
Why else but to help us conquer the darkness?  
Why else but to set us free from our prisons?

Why else but to show us that God is love?