

"Who Does the Tenting?"

Text: Matthew 17: 1-9

2/10/2019

My family likes to go camping, especially my wife and two boys. Meredith and I will tag along, but it's really Kelly and the boys who enjoy the whole camping thing. You'll probably find this amusing, but when it's time to put up the tent, Kelly is the one who makes sure it gets done. Oh, in terms of setting up camp everybody chips in and does their part, but when it comes to the really important stuff-like putting up the tent - Kelly is the one who does the tenting. We all may think we're doing it, but she's the one calling the shots.

In today's Gospel Peter wants to call the shots, as he suggests to Jesus that he/Peter and the other disciples build tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter learns something though about who does the tenting with God. So that we learn it too, we take a closer look now at today's Gospel ...

As we do, we hear again that:

"Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him."(Mt. 17: 1-3)

This is somewhat of a puzzling story, at first glance - the story of our Lord's Transfiguration. When we hear it we may well wonder what it's trying to teach us about Jesus? We notice several things though when we look closer at it in Matthew today ...

- It takes place on a mountain - which calls to mind the ancient exodus of Israel from Egypt, and how afterward Moses went up on a mountain to speak with the LORD.
- Along those same lines, and as we'll see in just a minute, there's the presence of a cloud in this text, with the LORD speaking from it - which also calls to mind the exodus, in particular the wandering of Israel in the wilderness, and how the Lord was present in her midst in the form of a cloud.
- The central figure: Jesus, undergoes a change, as His face shines brightly - and this too calls to mind Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the central figure of that exodus: Moses, as his face shone brightly after speaking with the LORD (see today's O.T. Lesson).

All of those things make it clear that, in today's Transfiguration text, Matthew closely links together Jesus with God's people "of old": the people of Israel, and their leader: Moses. And that is a fitting link, for as Moses delivered God's people 'of old' from their bondage in Egypt, so too did Jesus deliver them from a greater bondage - that of sin and death. The exodus from Egypt of God's people 'of old' - the people of Israel, was fulfilled by the New Israel that is God's Son: Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection opens up the way to the Promised Land of new life, a life as God's people that will never end.

We've made mention before that in the Gospel of Matthew (and all the Gospels, really) Jesus is portrayed as the One Who lived up to the terms of God's covenant for His people Israel. We see that as we continue hearing further from the text of our Lord's Transfiguration, as Matthew goes on to write:

"Peter said to Jesus: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'" (v. 4)

Those tents call to mind the Tabernacle 'of old,' what was also referred to as the Tent of Meeting - the Tent where God met with His people Israel, in accordance with His covenant with her, to forgive her her sins. The presence at the Transfiguration of Moses and Elijah testifies to that, as Moses was the original giver of the covenant, and Elijah was the first of the great prophets to call Israel to repentance for her sin against it. Matthew's Transfiguration account is about Jesus being the One Who lived up to the terms of God's covenant with His people, ratifying it for them forever. Indeed, Jesus ratified God's covenant/or ALL people, with the new covenant of His blood earning salvation and providing forgiveness for the WHOLE world.

Matthew writes:

"While he (Peter) was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said: 'This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" (v. 5)

Matthew writes that after the disciples fell to the ground in fear after hearing the voice, Jesus then came to them and said:

"'Get up, and do not be afraid.' And lifting up their eyes," Matthew writes, "they saw no one except Jesus, and Him only." (vs. 7-8)

Then Matthew finishes his account of Jesus' Transfiguration by writing:

"As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying: 'Tell no one what you have seen until the Son of Man (Jesus) has risen from the dead.'" (v.9)

Folks, before you can rise from the dead you have to first be dead. And that is how Jesus would ratify the new covenant (testament") with God's people: He would shed His blood on the altar of Calvary's cross in payment for sin.

That says something about who does the tenting. You see, Peter thought he and the other disciples would set up tents for Jesus, and I guess camp there on the mountain forever with Jesus and Moses and Elijah. But Peter wasn't the one who was going to do the tenting. God was. And He did that by nailing His Son to a cross.

We see that from taking a closer look at what Matthew says in v. 5:

"While he (Peter) was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said: 'This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" (v. 5)

Folks, in the original, the word that is rendered there as "overshadowed" is the word "tented." So the text actually reads: "a bright cloud tented them." As Peter expresses a desire to tent Jesus, Peter himself is tented by God.

God is the One Who does the tenting. God was the One Who tented Moses and the people of Israel in the Tent of Meeting 'of old' - tenting them under His saving presence, and God was the One Who tented Peter and the disciples on the mountain of the Transfiguration - tenting them under His saving presence in Jesus. God is the One Who tents us on the mountain of Transfiguration that is Jesus' Church, gathered around font, pulpit, and altar. As the voice of the Father said from the cloud, in words reminiscent of Jesus' Baptism:

"This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

"Listen to Him!" Listen to Him even when He speaks to you about His death (which Jesus does before and after the Transfiguration); listen to Jesus and be saved under the tent of God.

We've said throughout this season of Epiphany that Jesus is revealed to be certain things on each of the Sundays of the season - four weeks ago, on the day of the Baptism! of our Lord, Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God; three weeks ago, on the day we heard of Jesus' turning water into wine, He was revealed to be the New Creator, the One Who restores and makes all things new by Himself becoming "old" and dying on a cross; two weeks ago Jesus was revealed to be the One Who has all power, authority, using His authority for good, and last week Jesus was revealed to be the One Who uses authority for the good of creation. This week, as at the first, Jesus is again revealed to be the Son of God, Who in speaking the Word of God to us spreads God's tent of salvation over us. That's why we go to church; it's why we come here Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, throughout the year each and every year, to start our every week - here we receive God's covenant fulfilled in Jesus' Name, Word, and Body & Blood; here we are forgiven and saved.

And so my dear friends in Christ, regardless of whatever sins you committed last week - no matter the offense, no matter the shame - you are part of the New Israel of God. You are the people of God Who will live forever, because Jesus died and rose again for you. No matter what awaits you in the week ahead, God will tent Himself over you. You have His Word on that, the Word of Jesus -

- in His ✝ Name,

Amen!