

# "From Tent To Mansion"

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

June 14, 2015

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Camping is certainly a popular pastime in Montana, especially now that the summer temperatures are upon us. For many people, camping it means pulling a big fifth wheel to a place where you can “rough it” with your air conditioning, television, microwave, refrigerator, and full sized beds.

Camping in a tent is a bit of a different experience. I’ve personally had more experience with that kind of camping. No matter how you lay down, there is always a big rock sticking in your back, even if you have an air mattress. The wind can whip through the flaps and zippers of your tent, keeping you awake at night. On a hot muggy night, you are hot and muggy in your tent. Bugs and bears may come calling. Both may want to eat you. And if it rains, watch out for leaks or the possibility of the tent collapsing or blowing over. You are never completely comfortable or at home in a tent like that. Sometimes, when it gets really rough when you are roughing it, the only way you can stand it is the thought that it will soon all be over and you’ll be going to your permanent, much more comfortable and sturdy home.

Life can be like such a camping experience – only much worse. Life can be very messy and uncomfortable as we live with day to day conflicts and frustrations. It can be painful and dangerous as we face financial difficulty, family crises, physical and mental diseases, pain, and even death. We tend complain as our suffering doesn’t seem to get any better. In fact, personally, locally, nationally, and world wide, suffering just seems to be getting worse and worse. War, terrorism, violence, unrest, economic difficulties, and many other things contribute to our frustration, discomfort, and suffering. These things can even lead to despair and the desire to just give up.

The only way we can possibly endure suffering in this life is if this life and the suffering it contains is only temporary like a tent and that we know we are headed for a permanent and more comfortable home. This is what our text for today is promising us.

The idea of a tent as metaphor for the temporary nature of life is one that St. Paul would have been familiar with. After all, he was, by trade, a tentmaker. He knew as well as anyone that a tent is only a temporary dwelling. It's also a Biblical concept. Abraham lived in tents as he traveled to a new homeland because that land would not truly belong to him until his descendants settled in it for good, centuries later. Then his descendants would enjoy more permanent dwelling places.

God's Ark of the Covenant would reside in a tent, the tabernacle, for many years, as Israel wandered throughout the wilderness. It was only centuries later that King Solomon would build a permanent home for it – the Temple, the house of the Lord.

So, it's no wonder that St. Paul refers to our present body as a "tent." Our lives and everything in which we dwell are only temporary. We long for something more permanent and lasting. Like the end of a camping trip spent in a tent when we want to go to a more comfortable and permanent structure that we can call home, so, too, as we spend more and more time in this life with all the pain, suffering and frustrations in our bodies, how we long to leave this life and go to a more comfortable and permanent home where we will be free from suffering permanently.

St. Paul says we already have such a home. He writes, "We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Jesus has prepared such a home for each of you which is from God, is permanent, and in heaven. Remember Jesus' words in John 14 from old King James Version: In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2) A mansion? For you and me? How?

Jesus' preparation did not start in heaven, but here on earth. Before Jesus could prepare a permanent home in heaven for us, He first had to prepare us. He had to take care of the problem that put us into tents in the first place. God originally created us to live forever here in the bodies He created for us. But sin changed that. Sin is more than just a theological concept to be learned in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. Sin is a condition – a rebellion against God and His will – which shows forth in sinful actions. Sin is a reality which hurts us now and forever. Sin has ripped us

away from a safe and peaceful dwelling place with God in His heavenly mansions and has made us to live in dangerous and strife filled tents here on this earth which are full only of suffering and pain.

Jesus came to prepare a new place for us to dwell. He did that by becoming one of us. He took on our mortal dwelling – our human flesh, not just temporarily and certainly not for free. It cost Jesus dearly to do this. He absorbed all of our evil deeds, our sinfulness, and paid the full price for them in His body on the cross.

On the night before He died, Jesus promised that He was leaving His disciples to prepare a place – a mansion, if you will – for each of them, not only by dying on the cross, but by rising from the dead, rising to life, and rising to His throne in heaven. In that way, He could be where He was preparing our permanent home until He could come and bring us to our new home.

How do we know this to be true, as St. Paul said? Before you have a home, buy a home, or possess a home, there is one important thing you must do in order to secure the home. You put a down payment down to secure the home. The down payment is your promise to purchase the whole thing.

God has done the same for us. St. Paul writes, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” This word referring to the Holy Spirit means a guarantee in the sense of a deposit or a down payment. In our baptism, in addition to cleansing us from our sin, God has made a down payment for our permanent and pleasurable home in heaven. It is His promise to you that, although you are living in tents now, He has purchased and is now preparing a magnificent mansion for you which you are guaranteed to receive at a later date. We have God’s promise now. We will have His blessing later.

So, how do we live now? It is not with complaint or despair. Those come from looking around and seeing the circumstances surrounding life in our tents here. As Christians, we live differently. That doesn’t mean we deny the severity of suffering or smile and pretend that suffering doesn’t exist. Christians have sometimes been accused of having a “don’t worry, be happy” approach to life where

everything will be fine if you just trust Jesus enough. Suffering is very real and sometimes quite severe even for Christians - sometimes *especially* for Christians as we live out our faith.

As Christians we admit the reality of suffering in our lives. We even groan because of it, St. Paul says. But we look at it differently. St. Paul says, “We are always of good courage.” It means we are not afraid. We do not despair. We never give up. Instead, we live confidently and courageously, despite the pain, despite the problems, and despite the suffering, no matter how bad it gets.

Why? St. Paul says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” In other words, “We conduct our lives on the basis of faith, not the appearance of things.” Things are not always as they appear to be. Things appear to be pretty bad. Faith allows us to understand the reality. Faith sees the tent of our existence – that the troubles of this life are as temporary as a weekend camping trip in a tent. Faith sees beyond the tent to the mansion which has been prepared for us by Jesus. This is no blind faith based on wishes and dreams. Our faith and its goal of eternal life are based on two things. First, it has been established on the perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ to earn us our mansion. Second, it will be guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as a deposit which will be paid in full when we leave this temporary earthly home to enter into our eternal heavenly home.

Because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus and what He will do for us by the Holy Spirit, we are free from the guilt of the past, the fear of the present, and the worry about the future. As St. Paul says, “So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please [the Lord].” We lead God pleasing lives, begun in baptism, strengthened through His Word, and fed by His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, in which we don’t necessarily do spectacular things. We simply love and serve God by loving and serving our neighbor.

So, if you go camping this summer and you don’t use a tent, at least THINK about a tent and be reminded that being in a tent is nothing like being at home (being in a 5<sup>th</sup> wheeler isn’t either). No matter how disastrous a camping trip might be, there is always home to look forward to. Life is the

same. No matter how disastrous life might be, there is always a heavenly home to look forward to. Until then, find joy in this life, endure the suffering, make it your aim to please the Lord, and eagerly look forward to your permanent and lasting home with the Lord in heaven. You'll get there. Amen.