

Pentecost 14, Year B
August 26, 2018
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Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and were banished, human beings have had to live with the reality of separation from God. There are times when God's Presence is made abundantly clear. In the Exodus, when the Israelites were gathered on the edge of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was bearing down on them to kill them, God came to them in the form of a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. That tangible expression of God's Presence stood between the Egyptians and the Israelites until the Israelites had crossed safely through the parted waters of the Red Sea.

The cloud again descended on the top of Mt. Sinai and God spoke to Moses out of it to give him the Ten Commandments and the whole of the Law. That same cloud of Presence traveled with the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness for forty years, and where it stopped they stopped and put up the Tent of Meeting, the marker of the sacred spot where one came to meet with God.

In today's reading from the Old Testament we hear again of the cloud of God's Presence. When Solomon finished overseeing the building of the Temple and the ark of the covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies, the

innermost sacred space of the Temple, the text tells us: **“a cloud filled the house of the Lord...the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.”**

It was clear that God was present in that place, just as God had been present at the Tent of Meeting. When one desired to be in the Presence of God one could come to the Temple; the longing for and love of the Temple was understood as an expression of one’s desire for God. This profound love and desire is expressed in Psalm 84, which we read today, and in the sequence hymn which we sang this morning that paraphrases it:

**How lovely is thy dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts, to me!
My thirsty soul desires and longs
within thy courts to be;
my very heart and flesh cry out,
O living God for thee.**

Since the destruction of the Temple, however, there is no one building to which we can make a pilgrimage to be in the Presence of God. Yes, the whole universe belongs to God, but where is our Tent of Meeting? Jesus has an unexpected answer: ***He*** is our Tent of Meeting. In the prologue to the Gospel of John we hear, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us....”** The literal meaning of *lived* in this phrase is *pitched a tent*, as in the Tent of Meeting. The new place in which God

pitched a tent is in the flesh of Jesus. It is this very flesh that Jesus insists on sharing with us, so that we might have life as God has life—eternal life.

How are we to have this life in us like Jesus does? Jesus says, **“...those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”** Like the Israelites, there is now a place where we come when we want to encounter the Presence of God. We come to follow the commandment of Jesus to eat his flesh and drink his blood in the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist. It is no coincidence that when we look at the altar when it is set up for the Holy Eucharist that the bread and wine are sheltered under what looks like a small tent, for it is in this place that we find *our* Tent of Meeting.

We offer bread and wine at the altar, repeating the words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper with his disciples, and saying: **“Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.”** And God fills the bread and wine with God’s Presence, just as surely as the cloud of God’s Presence filled the Temple before Solomon and the Israelites. When we receive the Holy Eucharist we hear these words: **“The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven. The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation.”** It is in this bread and wine that we do as Jesus says, eating his

flesh and drinking his blood. In doing so we too are filled with the Presence of God.

When I lived in California I went to Diocesan Convention one year. One of the youth leaders I worked with came up to me, beaming. He said he had found the perfect gift for me and held up this: Apron that says: **“The Body of Christ. The Blood of Christ. You are what you eat.”**

God filled the Temple with Divine Presence. God was fully present in Jesus as the Divine Incarnation. And when we receive both baptism and the Holy Eucharist, God fills us. *We* become God’s Tent of Meeting. That is why C. S. Lewis famously said, **“Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”**

Divine Presence, like Divine Love, has never been limited to what is logical, rational, or easily proven. The question posed to us, as it has been to those who have stood before Jesus throughout time, is whether we believe Jesus’ promise to share the love of God with us, and whether we are willing to be forever changed by inviting God to pitch a tent in us.

Amen