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John 1:14

Third Message

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# GOD WITH MAN IS NOW RESIDING

SERIES: ADVENT 2013

The four lit advent candles reminds us that today is the fourth Sunday of advent and Christmas is just around the corner. Children are now on vacation and the anticipation for Christmas morning is building. Parents are rushing around making final preparations and cooking up a storm. Retailers are trying to entice people with last minute specials and every few minutes we get emails telling us that today really is the last day for free shipping. On top of the hustle and bustle, memories of Christmases past are triggering all kinds of emotions. We hear “I’ll Be Home For Christmas” and without warning our eyes suddenly well up with tears. The season is Christmas and we are reminded in the familiar song that “it’s the most wonderful time of the year, the happiest season of all.” Well, perhaps that might be true for some, but I don’t think everyone would agree.

And yet we want Christmas to be special and wonderful. We think it should be. So, in the midst of all the preparations, travel, and parties, people around the world fill churches today, on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas day hoping for a message, a word that will fill them with a joy and gladness not derived from presents, food, or family gatherings. People gather to once again hear the story about a baby born to a virgin teenager and a confused husband. People know that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus and they look to God to fill their hearts with warmth and love and hope.

The last two weeks we have looked at two important advent themes. We talked two weeks ago about how God made a promise to rescue his people, but his people had to wait a very long time for that promise to be fulfilled. God was painfully slow. Advent reminds us of waiting, longing, and hoping for the arrival of God in our lives and in our world. While we are waiting we let go of expectations for how God will come and instead open our hearts to see him when he arrives. It is never “if” God will come, only “when” and “how.” Two weeks ago we sang, “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.”

Last week we talked about God’s smallness and hiddenness. Even though God could have come with power and majesty, this is not how he came to earth. God came in the form of a small, dependent baby who arrived in a quite unremarkable way. Advent reminds us that God works in the hidden places, in unspectacular ways, amongst people who are not regarded as significant. God doesn’t have to create a spectacle to be spectacular. Last week we sang “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”

Now today we sing “Angels From the Realms of Glory,” and the theme we take up is the idea expressed in a phrase from that song: “God with man is now residing.” Later we will sing, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” where we encounter another phrase that speaks to the same truth: “pleased as man with man to dwell.” What these phrases suggest to us is that in the birth of Jesus, God came to dwell among his people. God lowered himself and emptied himself to take the form of a man. He came to rescue his people and to bring salvation to the world. Advent reminds us that God abides with us.

No one captures this theme better than the apostle John. John opens his gospel in verse one by saying:

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”**  
(John 1:1–2 ESV)

And then in verse 14 John adds:

**“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14).

Jesus is the Word, the Logos, the very expression of the invisible God, God’s one-of-a-kind, unique Son. The Word of God existed with and independent of God but was fully God. And it was this Word of God that became flesh. There are two ideas in verse 14 that I want to highlight for us this morning— God dwelling among his people and the manifestation of his glory.

First, God dwelt among us, or as Eugene Peterson puts it, God “moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 The Message). The word “dwell” means “to pitch a tent” and in the noun form means “tabernacle.” This is certainly an allusion to the tabernacle that Israel made while in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. In fact, the Greek word and Hebrew word bear a great deal of similarity—in Hebrew tabernacle is *mishkan* and the Greek word is *skene*. Notice the same consonants s, k, and n. John was well aware of what he was saying. He is saying that the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us.

The tabernacle was the place where God dwelled with his people while they wandered in the wilderness for forty years before entering the promised land of Canaan. We find the detailed instructions on its design in Exodus 25–31 and a detailed description of its building in Exodus 35–40.

God said to Moses in Exodus 25:

**“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it”** (Exodus 25:8).

A little further on God tells Moses:

**“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God”** (Exodus 29:45–46).

At the conclusion of the book of Exodus we read:

**“Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys”** (Exodus 40:34–40).

When you read the instructions for the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and all the furniture it is absolutely amazing. This was no pup tent. This was no schlocky construction job, no half-hearted wilderness project. This was a masterpiece. It might be easy to skip over these chapters of Exodus, but when you read through them slowly you get a sense of the care, detail, precision and craftsmanship that went into the making of God's sanctuary. Just by reading the text one is filled with a sense of the holiness of God. In fact, when Moses would go into the tent of meeting and speak face to face with God, all of Israel would stand in front of their tents and worship. The tabernacle was a holy place and a constant reminder of God's presence among his people.

When Israel came into the land of Canaan, eventually they built the temple in Jerusalem that replaced the tabernacle. The temple was the place that God dwelled and met with his people. But that temple was destroyed when Babylon invaded the land. By the time of Jesus, God's presence had been absent for a long time. But Zechariah had spoken of another day:

**“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.” (Zechariah 2:10–11)**

John is saying that God has once again come to dwell with his people. The birth of Jesus is like the construction of the tabernacle all over again, but much greater than the tabernacle, for God has come in flesh and blood. And not only does God come to Israel but now to all nations. Isaiah foretold and Matthew records that the name of the boy born to a virgin should be called Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

God dwelling with his people is a theme running through the Bible and so we are not surprised to read in John's vision of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21 that he sees Jerusalem coming down from heaven adorned as a bride for her husband and hears a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Revelation 21:3).

God's dwelling with his people is what we remember during Advent. And we don't just remember a distant event, we don't just recall what happened in the past, but rather we proclaim and celebrate a remarkable, present reality. Jesus told his disciples that after he left he would send the Paraclete, the Helper, the very Spirit of God to dwell not just with his people but within his people. Every year the Feast of Tabernacles reminded Israel of their wilderness wanderings. And it was during this feast that Jesus cried out: “Whoever believes in me...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jesus was referring to the Spirit. And then before his ascension he promised his disciples, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

God dwelt with Israel in the Tabernacle and Temple. God dwelled among mankind in Jesus. And now God dwells with us through his Spirit. God dwells with you. Your body is the tabernacle of God. Jesus didn't just come 2000 years ago, but is here now, present with his people.

Liz and I have had a Labrador retriever for the past 13½ years. In the last several months she began to fail and the day before Thanksgiving, we had to put Lucy down. We had grown so used to

her presence that now there is a big void. Every time we hear a noise we think it is Lucy. Every time we come home we expect to see her. We keep thinking we need to let her out before we go to bed. I am reminded that while Lucy lived with us, her presence was always there, sometimes driving me crazy, but always there. Now Lucy is in the sky with diamonds. The loss of an animal or a person that we loved deeply always brings the loss of presence.

My wife has an uncanny connection to animals and develops deep personal bonds, so Lucy was Liz's companion. The two were inseparable. Whenever Liz moved Lucy would be at her heels. When Lucy heard the garage door open she sat expectantly at the back door. Liz could not even get up from a chair without Lucy being aware of her movements. For the past several years Liz has often been bed-ridden with migraine headaches. But Lucy was always there at her side, a source of comfort and companionship.

Please, don't feel sorry for Liz and drop off a puppy on our doorstep. Liz has another animal, a rather large horse. I am just hoping that she doesn't want to bring him home to live with us.

But, in the way that Lucy was always present with Liz, so God is present with us. Like Lucy and Liz, we can't move without God noticing and he is always at our side. Even though Jesus died, he rose from the dead and is present with us through the Spirit.

Albert Day writes:

[God] is closer to our minds every moment than our own thoughts. He is nearer to our hearts than our own feelings. He is more intimate with our wills than our most vigorous decisions. If we are not aware of him, it is not because he is not with us. It is, in part, because our consciousness is so under the sway of other interests that it cannot turn to him with the loving attention which might soon discern him.

What makes life splendid is the constant awareness of God. What transforms the spirit into his likeness is intimate fellowship with him. We are saved—from our pettiness and earthiness and selfishness and sin—by conscious communion with his greatness and love and holiness.<sup>1</sup>

Every day is Christmas, because God continues to reside among his people. Moses would talk to God face to face as one would with a man. God became a man and now each and every one of us can carry on conversations with God. We are WiFi hotspots in communion with God, always connected, free internet access, and we don't even need a smart phone. We have something much better—the Holy Spirit.

God dwelling with his people brings several thoughts to mind. First, the fact that the tabernacle was designed with such precision and detail should give us a hint of how precious we are to God. Sometimes we think we are unworthy or inadequate or that we are unclean and unholy. But the coming of Jesus reminds us that God himself has sanctified us and consecrated us as his sanctuary. We are intricately created and designed to be the dwelling place of God. We are holy to the Lord (Col. 3:12).

Second, the fact that God abides with us means that while we may feel lonely, we are never alone. We can't see an invisible God and we don't always sense or feel his presence, but we can count on the fact that he is always near to us. I know that there are many people here who feel lonely, especially at Christmas. This might be due to depression or disappointments or heartache. But no matter

how low we might sink, God never leaves us alone. We can always lean into him.

Third, the fact that God abides with us means that even though there is darkness in the world, the light has come and darkness cannot overcome it. Because God dwells in us we don't have to fear the darkness.

Nine days ago, Friday, at about noon, I received a call from my daughter. She said, "Dad you have to pray. There has been a shooting at the high school and everyone is in lockdown." Sara lives in Centennial, Colorado, three blocks from Arapahoe high school where a young man walked into the school and began shooting. Sara was overwhelmed because she couldn't get to my grandson who was nearby at his elementary school. Through her tears of anguish she said, "Dad, why does this keep happening?"

The world is a messy place filled with darkness. The truth is that there will always be darkness in our world until Jesus comes again. We can get discouraged by just reading what is happening in Syria and Egypt or even in the Bay Area. But God is with us and nothing can extinguish his light.

As I alluded to earlier, the Feast of Tabernacles was a yearly celebration of the time when the people wandered in the wilderness and lived in tents and beheld God dwelling with his people. This was the greatest celebration of the year in Jerusalem and provides the context for John, chapters 7–9. On the last day there was a great celebration and the people celebrated underneath four huge lights set on tall poles. It was during that feast that Jesus said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The second thing I want to comment on in John 1:14 is this idea of glory, the glory of God. John says that we, meaning himself and others, saw the glory of God in the Son, full of grace and truth. In Jesus God's glory was on full display for all to see. Glory is another big theme in the Scripture and was also connected to the tabernacle.

When the building of the tabernacle was complete, we read in Exodus 40:

**"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34–35).**

When the building of the temple was completed by Solomon, we read in 1 Kings 8:

**"And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10–11).**

When Babylon invaded Israel and destroyed the temple, not only did God's presence depart but also his glory. God's glory and dwelling with his people are connected in Israel's history. Remember when the Philistines captured the ark of God as related in 1 Samuel 4? Eli and his two sons died and his daughter-in-law went into labor and gave birth to a son and named him Ichabod, meaning no glory, because the glory of God had departed from Israel. John is telling us in his gospel that when the Word became flesh people could once again see God's glory that surpassed anything that had gone before.

And what is God's glory? Usually one thinks of splendor and brilliance. The psalmist says that the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalms 19:1). Israel saw God's glory in the cloud and in the fire.

But here John tells us that the glory of God is the fullness of grace and truth. Here is another allusion to the Exodus story. In between the instructions for the tabernacle and the building of the tabernacle, Israel makes the golden calf, God's wrath burns, and Moses pleads with God for the people (Exodus 32 and 33). Moses asks to see God's glory, and so ascends Sinai once again with two fresh stone tablets. God descends on the mountain, and the Lord passes by Moses, covering his face with his hand, only allowing him to see his back.

God said to Moses,

**"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6–7).**

John is picking up on the two words here "steadfast love and faithfulness." (*hesed* and *emet*) Steadfast love is God's *hesed* love, his unending gracious love. Faithfulness in the Old Testament refers to being trustworthy and implies God's faithfulness to his promises. In other words, God kept his word.

John uses the word truth. Jesus manifests the faithfulness of God. Perhaps we also see hints of Jesus as the truth, the truth in regards to redemption and salvation, or living in the ways of truth, the truth as it is in Jesus. The law was holy, righteous, and good. Israel could see God's glory, his nature and character, in the Law. But now in Jesus we see a greater glory, we see the fullness of God's grace and truth. The glory of Jesus outshines the glory of the Law. People saw grace and truth in the things Jesus said and did, but the ultimate expression of God's grace was the cross, giving himself to save us from our sin. Grace trumps law every time.

As I said, the context for John 7–9 is the Feast of Tabernacles, the reminder of God dwelling with his people in glory. It is very interesting that John places the story of the woman caught in adultery right smack dab in the middle of this text. When Jesus asks the woman: "Has no one condemned you? She said, 'No one, Lord.' Then Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'" And then a few verses later Jesus tells those who had believed, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31–32).

God delights in offering grace—lavish, extravagant grace. And he loves for his people to walk in the ways of truth. Webster's Dictionary defines glory as something that gives praise and honor. When we see God's glory full of grace and truth, we fall to our knees in adoration and worship.

Where do we see God's glory now? It is in the place where he dwells, which is in us, his people, as we live out grace and truth. When someone receives God's grace through the cross of Christ the glory of God is manifested just as it was to Moses on Mount Sinai. When we extend grace to others and help guide people in truth God's glory is manifest through us for all to see. As people saw in Christ, so now the church is designed to manifest the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

And who is it that can see the glory of God? Not the high and mighty. In the birth narratives the ones who welcomed Jesus into the world were the lowly and poor, the barren and widowed—Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, lowly shepherds, foreign wise men. This remained true throughout Jesus' ministry—the sinners and tax gatherers, the women and the

lepers. And this is still true today. The rich and powerful, the movers and shakers, don't manifest God's glory. The lights of Vegas do not manifest God's glory. People seek to exalt themselves, to receive the praise and honor of mankind and so they exchange the glory of the incorruptible, immortal God for worthless idols. The ones who see God's glory are the least, the lost, and left out; the weak, the weary, and the wicked, those who are poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the ones who humble themselves before a mighty God.

Advent reminds us of God with man now residing and how we can manifest to the world the glory of God's grace and truth. During the next few days of the Christmas season, you might consider what it means to you personally that God has made his home in you and you might look for God's glory to be revealed to you. You may well be surprised as to where you find it.

*Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may know your presence with us and may you manifest your glory through our lives, glory full of grace and truth.*

1. Rueben Job and Norman Shawchuck quoting Albert Edward Day, "A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants." The Upper Room, Nashville, 1983, 36-37

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