

Britt Carlson
April 10, 2016

11 o'clock service

The Community Church of Issaquah
Issaquah, Washington

"The Lion and the Lamb"

John 2:13-22

My parents' first rule of parenting was "Try to say yes." They always tried to say yes to the things that my sisters and I wanted to do.

But around all of that Yes there were a whole lot of No's. No—you cannot drive over the mountains to go to the beach when you are sixteen years old. No—you will not keep on attending private school if you don't keep your grades up. And the worst: No—you definitely do not get to leave the table until you have eaten all of those scrambled eggs sitting on your plate.

Anyone who has parented for more than mmm, a day knows that their love of their child brings a whole lot of No's. And anyone who has read the Gospel of John knows how quickly those No's can come.

The Gospel of John opens with one of the grandest Yeses in the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *God*... And the Word became flesh and lived among us." The meek and mild Lamb of God comes into the world.

And then with neck-snapping speed that same Lamb of God is making a whip of cords, tossing the Temple's tables in the air and using more exclamation marks than a professor of English would approve of.

The Lamb of God has come and he's *fierce*.

But should we be surprised? There has been some serious tension brewing between Yahweh and God's people over the Temple for about the past thousand years at this point, because lets be clear, Yahweh never wanted the Temple in the first place.

Back in 2 Samuel when the ever-wandering, ever-cash-strapped people of Israel were settling into the land and things were finally looking up financially, King David offers to build the Lord a more suitable dwelling place than the dusty, worn-out tabernacle that God had been travelling around the Israelite countryside with. Not a bad plan considering that David has already built himself a palace—it's probably about time for God to get his own place.

But to everyone's surprise, Yahweh isn't down with this plan of David's. "Um excuse me," he says. "I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle."

I love what Mennonite pastor, Meghan Goode, points out: "In the midst of all the good intentions," she says, "the one thing no one thought to ask was what sort of house *God* wanted. And surprise of all surprises: God wants the tent. *God loves the tent.*"¹ That dusty tabernacle that the Israelites hauled through the wilderness is where God wants to be. God wants to be out with the people, travelling with them.

So when Jesus comes up to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover, the proverbial last straw has been laid on the camel's back.

You can almost hear Yahweh saying, "For the final time the answer is No! Nope, you're not getting it right with the moneychangers. Nope, you're not getting it right with your animal sacrifices. I have come to be with you, to be your

¹ Meghan Goode, "God Loves the Tent."
<http://freshexpressionsus.org/2012/01/11/meghan-good-god-loves-the-tent/>

God... and you keep wanting a building more than you want me.

God's answer to the Temple is no because God's answer to the Tabernacle is Yes.

John 1:14 proclaims, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." The Greek work for "lived among" actually is the word for "to tabernacle." God became flesh and tabernacled among us. The Word, God Godself, came down and didn't think that these somewhat shabby, prone-to-death bodies we have were beneath him. Yahweh chose the tent. Jesus is God coming and setting up shop right where all the people are. The fullness of what the tabernacle meant in the midst of us, among us, mobile and moving, and now even living and speaking and declaring that the Temple was not what God had in mind in the first place.

Aren't we still tempted to be a temple people? I don't know why buildings are so seductive to us, but they are.

There's a church I know of that back about ten years ago decided to do a major expansion that probably about doubled the size of the church building. It was the early 2000s, the church had been growing and they thought that an expanded, new building would draw even more people in. I've seen the new building and it's gorgeous. But that building had a major cost. The church now has an almost unpayable multi-multi million dollar debt. The building was well-intended but is such a burden now.

If you've ever been to Europe you know that beautiful, big church buildings do not equal vibrant, living congregations. There is nothing quite so disconcerting as seeing the love of God carved into stone and stain glass and yet no sound of voices singing their Savior's praise.

When Jesus, God-tabernacling-among-us, goes to the Temple, and throws out the moneychangers and animals we are shown once and for all that our God, the God we worship, the God of Israel likes the tabernacle. God is a god who likes to get out there and do things.

This is a God on a mission, a God who is always walking throughout the world seeking and saving the lost, not a God who is holed up in a sanctuary waiting for the world to come to him. A God of the tabernacle and not of the temple.

This is the mission that we are invited into as well. Jesus saves us by not letting us stay at home. Jesus saves us by sending us out. These walls that keep us safe and sheltered can all too easily become walls that separate us from them, walls that stifle and confine us. When God came roaming the Judean countryside and going out to the people, we got a No to our attempts to keep God inside the box and a Yes to getting outside of these four walls that surround us.

So here's my question for us today. Are we a temple people or a tabernacle people? Are we a people who stay inside or a people who set up their tents right in the midst of the crowds? Are we a brick and mortar people or are we a missional people?

Vincent Donovan was a Catholic missionary to the Masai for seventeen years. He tells the story of trying to translate the word "faith" into the Masai language. He and his assistant had been using a word that literally meant "to agree to" but when he tried it out with a Masai elder it didn't work very well. "No," said the elder. "That kind of believing is like a white hunter shooting an animal with his gun from a great distance. Only his eyes and his fingers took part in the act. For a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death leap and single

blow to the neck with the front paw, the blow that actually kills. And as the animal goes down the lion envelops it in his arms, pulls it to himself, and makes it part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.”

Now Donovan was little to say duly impressed at this man’s understanding of how all-encompassing having faith is—how it involves all of you—not just your finger and your eye. But the wise old man wasn’t done.

“We did not search you out, Father,” he told Donovan. “We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him, even leave our land and our people to find him. But we have not done this... We have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God.”²

That Masai elder, he had met the God of the Tabernacle. That is a person who has been found by a God who is not content to stay in the Temple and is not content to have his people stay in the Temple either. We are constantly being driven out of the Temple.

So where are we? Are we searching people out? Are we getting out of this building? Are we going into town hall meetings, into coffee shops, into workplaces, into shelters, into community centers, into homes? Because our God is the lion who has searched for us and called us by name and who is searching and calling for them too.

² Vincent Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered*. Pg 48.

Jesus didn’t come down all the way from heaven to stay within the church’s corridors. He came to be with the *people* wherever the people are. So where are the people? And what would it look like for us to follow our living Tabernacle, Jesus, out to where they are? Our worry as followers of Christ isn’t why aren’t people here with us, it’s why aren’t we there with them.

I see us being a Tabernacle people. I see it when I visit the library and see our church members walking around. I saw it when we went around delivering cookies to our neighbors at Christmastime. I see it especially in the decision to move here, to this shopping center among the people. We have been and can be a people who follow God out of this place and into the streets. Day by day we can choose to wake up and follow God out of our comfort zones and into the world.

That church I was talking about earlier—the one with multi-million dollar debt—hasn’t lost sight of God’s mission either. The building process was going to be done in stages, but because the first stage proved to be more than the church needed a large basement underneath the sanctuary was left unfinished. It sat unused for a few years until some people had an idea. What if we took this temple and turned it into a tabernacle? What if we used that space to house community ministries? So as of today that unfinished basement—once meant to be an expanded children’s ministry area—now is a food pantry. And a cold weather shelter. And every Monday night from 5-7pm the space plays host to a community dinner. 115 people from the church and community week after week show up to break bread together. Being chased out of the Temple has meant being chased toward new friends, new relationships, new stories that the church have never experienced otherwise.

The day Jesus came into the Temple turning over tables and chasing out all that he found there was the day when we heard God’s final answer to the

Temple. That answer is No. No—we are not allowed to stay within four walls. God is on the move. Yahweh is a God of the tent. The God who leaves heaven and begins to walk among us. Jesus Christ: the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us. The Lamb of God. The Lion of Judah. Amen.