

## I Will Walk Among You

✧ My dwelling place (v.11)

✧ My people (v.12)

In the name of Jesus, where God lives with us, dearly redeemed family of God:

All over the country families are camping. All that work to fight bugs? No, it's the great outdoors. My older sister still remembers how other campers would shake their heads in awe when our family of eight peeled out of the Volkswagen "Bug" with our black lab Nifty. Everyone had a job to set up the tent and start cooking supper. One more baby – Dad bought a VW bus! Ah, togetherness!

Most of my camping memories are good. Except Midwest thunderstorms pouring through a short zipper in our tent while my Dad mopped up with our towels. And a tornado that rocked the borrowed camper which I tied to our minivan as if that would help! What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Now think about this! What if you could go camping with God? What if all the bears and birds and bugs were friendly? Vacation paradise, right? Like Adam and Eve in the Garden with God. How great would that be every day walking and talking with God in the cool of the evening? What happened?

✧ My dwelling place (v.11)

Everything was fine as long as Adam and Eve listened to God's Word. They loved God and were madly in love with each other. A handsome man from the hand of God. A perfect "Ten" beauty created by God from his side. Love and harmony were everywhere around and in them. How could life be better? But then Satan convinced them of his lie: To be like God they had to disobey God. They trusted Satan instead of God and ended up terrified by God's holiness and blaming each other for their shame.

What happened then is still happening now. It still terrifies people when the just and holy God says, "**I Will Walk Among You.**" In his latest *Forward in Christ* article, "Who do you trust?" Editor Pastor John Braun references a *Reader's Digest* survey of 1000 Americans. They said they trusted doctors first, then teachers, then movie stars, then philanthropists, and last in the list, spiritual leaders. Maybe you can understand doctors and teachers. Maybe even why spiritual leaders are last after so many charlatans have robbed people. But movie stars? Their job is to make fiction look real. See what's happening? When God speaks, pride says, "Who cares?" When God comes walking, guilt runs away!

God wants to be close to His creatures in a loving, caring relationship. So in order to make sin and His promise of a Savior clear to the whole world, the LORD planted a tiny nation as His own on a narrow strip of land called Israel. Their laws were like a fence keeping them holy to God and shining the light of God's holiness for all the world to see. In our text Moses is teaching Israel in the desert at Mount Sinai headed for the Promised Land. You can hear the Old Covenant in the opening verses of this chapter: "**Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God. Observe [guard] my Sabbaths and have reverence for [fear] my sanctuary [holy place]. I am the LORD. If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...**" – then he lists wonderful rewards which include our two verses, "**If you obey...I will put my dwelling place among you and I will not abhor you.**"

Here's the problem. Most of the chapter lists drastic punishments "*if*" they disobey: Harvests lost to insects, disease and marauders. Ground and sky too hard for crops and fruit. Disease and wild animals killing their children. Enemies besieging their cities, making them eat their children to survive. Nothing left but smoldering rubble as their enemies lead them away in chains to captivity. Mostly for missing church (vv.34f) their land would have a Sabbath rest while they were gone. How frightening to think God could punished His own people like that! What would He do to Gentiles, non-Jews like us?

Even when we try, it's so easy to mess up. When I moved to the Sem. in Wisconsin, I loaded the U-Haul truck with all my earthly possessions and one beautiful dresser belonging to my younger sister Ruth. I packed tight, padded and tied everything. On my second day driving eighteen hours from Burley, Idaho, to Cheyenne, Wyoming, I pulled too tight off a curb and rocked the truck. I heard everything shift. Wouldn't you know it. One piece of furniture was damaged. My dear sister's prized dresser! Ouch!

God held out hope for His people and for us (vv.40ff). If they would confess their sins and turn back to God, He would remember His former covenant with their forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Later, God would repeat and expand that into His New Covenant which had no "If..." in it. It's all God, all grace, all mercy and forgiveness because God says, "***Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more!***" (Jeremiah 31:31-34) When God comes in mercy and forgiveness, we're glad to have Him stay! Not only does He set up His **dwelling place** with us, He says, "You are..."

### ☆ **My people (v.12)**

God gave them a Children's Lesson. Every year for the Feast of Tabernacles in the Fall, they had to go on a national camping trip. Work was illegal; vacation was mandatory. This feast foreshadowed the coming of Christ which the disciple Jesus loved reports in John 1:14: "***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [tent] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***" Jesus lives as God with us and makes us God's own **people**.

Some of you may remember Christmas 2000 at New Life: **God Dwells Among Us** (A Children's Christmas Service by Chris Gebert and Donald Patterson). We put a tent over our manger in the altar area with two signs with the Hebrew and Greek words for "tenting / dwelling": *Shakan – Skenow*.

Knowing God lives with us gives us great joy to be His **people**. I knew my sister would forgive me for her dresser because God forgives me for all my sins. On that trip, standing at the edge of Cheyenne, Wyoming, looking at the vast stars, I was thinking, "How Great Thou Art" to care for little me.

Being **people** of God lifts up families in the valley of the shadow of death. My wife's family with Dad Gross and Norm Schmeckpeper's family funeral this week – we all are blessed because God has saved us to be His people in Paradise-restored. John describes heaven as an eternal camping trip with God in Revelation: "***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea....And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling [tent] of God is with men, and he will live [tent] with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'***" (21:1,3-4 NIV84) Imagine that! Being on eternal vacation with God where everything is new!

Think about this when you're family camping or watching the campers on the road. Better yet, take a *Road Trip* with us in VBS this coming week – Monday-Wednesday, 6:30-8:00 PM. Kids will drive "Route 3:16" and many points of interest. Adults / Teens will be with me as we travel through our Lord's ministry in the Promised Land to the places *When Christ Walked Among Us* (NPH – James F. Pope).

Sin separated us from God and each other, but Jesus washed all sin away. Pride destroyed our relationships, but God kindly humbles us and gives us a new heart. Guilt wishes God would stay away, but God takes our guilt away, reassuring us again and again, "***Be of good cheer! Your sins are all forgiven.***" He sweeps away our doubts like early morning fog on a river. He refreshes our spirit with the cool mountain breezes of His Word and sacrament. When we are thirsty, He gives us clear, clean mountain springs of grace in this Good News that He lives among us now in Jesus and will have us home soon as His holy people in heaven forever. No more separation. No more tears. All because God chose to save us from our sins and make us His family through the willing sacrifice of our Brother Jesus Christ. To God be the glory. Great things He has done! For Jesus' sake, come live with us, your people! Amen.