

## Sept. 8 Sermon

Usually the Narrative Lectionary year starts with one of the creation stories from Genesis. I opted to do something a little different with this first Sunday of this year. John 1 is in fact the creation story that we will begin with.

It's rather a different creation story. It doesn't say anything about the Garden of Eden. There's nothing about animals and plants or Adam and Eve. Except that in a way, they are all there anyway.

In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God and through that Word, everything – plants, trees, skies, seas, animals and people – came into being.

That Word...is Christ. In the beginning was Christ...the cosmic Christ through whom everything that has ever existed, exists now or ever will exist comes into being.

The first story in Genesis also starts, In the beginning...in the beginning when God was creating heaven and earth, the universe was a void...it was nothing. And God said "let there be light."

And there was light. And life.

We often think of the incarnation as the birth of Jesus to his mother Mary. But if we are to understand John 1, creation itself was the first incarnation. In this Word...this cosmic Christ...God's very self was breathed into stardust, then stars, galaxies and planets. God's self was breathed and is being breathed as creation evolves. God's very self is incarnated in rocks and trees and skies and seas...and human beings.

God's very being infuses this ongoing creation, promising us that creation is headed somewhere...it's headed to its fulfillment, again in Christ. We are headed somewhere...God is moving creation to an amazing future...a new creation.

To make the promise more concrete for us, this eternal Word, the cosmic Christ, became human...the word emerged from this ongoing creation with skin and bones and blood and heart and all the stuff that makes us human. In Jesus.

The word came to live with us...the Greek word translated here as lived is related to the word tabernacle...a tent. In the human Jesus, God pitched God's tent with us.

Jesus is the physical sign of God's promise that creation is going somewhere...and going somewhere good.

Long before Jesus pitched his tent with us, God chose a series of human beings whose task was to work with God to move creation along its path to fulfillment.

Abraham and Sarah are one such couple. Or as they're called in today's reading, Abram and Sarai.

One of the spiritual practices I use from time to time is lectio divina, or sacred reading. We've gotten a taste of it as we've worked through it a few times as a congregation. It's where you read a passage multiple times and listen for the word or phrase that stands out to you and then you work through a series of meditations on that word or phrase.

For a period of time in the latter part of this summer I used this passage from Genesis in my daily meditations.

The first time I read it, what popped was the phrase "pitched his tent" from verse 8. Kind of an odd thing to have stand out, but that's kind of how the Spirit works in these spiritual practices.

As I worked through the meditation on it, I began to see some things.

So let's walk with Abraham and Sarah for a little bit and I'll see if I can articulate some of that.

In many ways, the couple has done well. They had possessions...they had servants they'd acquired. They likely had life as easy as it could be in those ancient days. Their big sadness was that they remained childless.

But God disrupts their lives, as God is prone to do. Go...God tells them, I've got something better than this in store for you. God makes a pretty profound promise to them...and through them to us.

God promises I will give you a new land. I will make of your descendants a great nation. I will bless you...and through you I will bless the whole world.

With little actual evidence that any of this will happen, Abram and Sarai go. They get a glimpse of this promised land, but at this point that's it. It will be years before any of it will come true.

In the meantime, Abram pitches their tent somewhere between the promise and its fulfillment.

That for me was the significance of the phrase "pitched his tent." When you are traveling between the promise and its fulfillment, you gotta pitch your tent somewhere.

We are living between the promise and its fulfillment. God's promise to bless the world and all its people still stands...that blessing continues to unfold as creation moves forward.

The promise we have in the Christ present at creation and in the human Jesus born to Mary, crucified and risen, is that creation is headed somewhere. It's headed to resurrection and new creation.

But we live in the in between time. We live in the time between creation and its fulfillment in the new creation.

In this in between time, we are called to pitch our tent and be in this time and place. And to trust that we are headed somewhere good.

That can be hard...it seems uncertain that the planet and its creatures will survive the myriad ways we find to destroy them...and each other.

It can be hard to trust this promise of blessing and to trust that creation is moving toward that blessing in Christ, when what we see around us is hate and suspicion and violence and paralyzing dysfunction in some of our institutions. When climate change threatens everything. When death is still a reality.

Yet it's in this troubled place, this is precisely where we're called to pitch our tent. It's easy for me to read the newspaper and feel pulled in a hundred different directions by the needs and crises of the world. There are plenty.

But ultimately I need to pitch my tent and do the work in that place that needs to be done and trust God to show me what that is.

When we pitch our tent, we do so knowing that in Christ, the eternal word, God infuses all creation with light. When we pitch our tent, and soak in the world around us, we begin to see Christ in everything. When we pitch our tent, we do so alongside the God who chose to pitch his tent with us.

Like Abraham, we pitch our tent, we call on God's name. We ask God for the kind of guidance Abraham and Sarah got in their journey. We call on God to show us how to be that blessing to the world.

We trust that God is continuing to create, that God is continuing to move creation toward that beautiful future...and we let that promise give us strength and courage to pitch our tent and do the work of love to which we are called in the here and now.

