

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, Virginia
December 25, 2011

Isaiah 7:10–14
John 1:1–14

CHRISTMAS CAMPING

It's that last verse that is so intriguing: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* Literally, the Word became flesh and built a tabernacle among us. The Word became flesh and pitched a tent among us. That is how the Jews would have heard this understanding of God's presence. They would have remembered their ancestors camping out in the wilderness and God coming in the cloud and the fire to camp in their midst. They would have remembered the tabernacle that symbolized God with them.

Today we celebrate the great celestial camping trip of the Trinity—the whole of God physically present in our midst. God is one of us. God is with us—Immanuel. This is what gives our lives meaning, our existence value. This is what makes physical well-being a matter that is so deeply spiritual. That gives fresh understanding to health care, doesn't it—God with us, concerned about the struggles that we face, God there to lend a hand as we pitch our tent in the midst of one another? Our pain is God's opportunity to embrace us with healing, to touch us and change us forever.

Oh yes, and notice exactly where God pitches that tent, in Christ - not in a safe place, not in a holy place. God sets up camp in the midst of a people who are being oppressed by the greatest empire that ever existed. They are dominated by the most powerful government that had come into being. It gives new meaning to the uprising around the globe for people who have been oppressed for decades. God isn't afraid to set up camp right in the middle of our social problems. Exactly where we are having personal difficulties, God comes and offers us shelter. When our spirits are weary, yes, even when our relationships and our emotions are frayed, God comes and not only offers us security, but helps us mend our tent.

The implications of establishing a permanent campground in our lives is profound indeed. And think about it. Think about the last time you went camping, or you helped someone else go camping, or you even read a story about camping. People don't usually go camping alone. Faith isn't limited just to our camping trip. It's an understanding of how Jesus comes and values us and asks us to value one another. Oh yes, I think it would be great to go on a camping trip, just Jesus and me. But as soon as we got back, he would encourage me to invite you into my life on my next journey. I must want you to come with us. I can't keep him just to myself.

Every person in this room, every person on the journey of faith around the globe, is valued because the Eternal has pitched a tent in our midst. If you have ever pushed an image of faith, I invite you to push this one. I invite you to unpack it, if you will. What is its meaning for you this Christmas—to look at Christ as coming and establishing a holy

presence wherever you are? Everywhere you look, there will be people who will need you. They need your camping skills and knowledge in their lives so that they can gain meaning, so that their lives can be vindicated the same way our lives have been affirmed and valued.

God comes among us and tabernacles. God pitches God's tent right beside ours. And the world is at peace. And there is light and warmth enough to share.

Merry Christmas. Peace, good will to all people. Amen.