

Sanctuaries

Matthew 17: 1-9

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As most of you know, we've been preaching a series from the first few chapter of Genesis. But this week, I want to take a break:

At first it was because I realized this was Super Bowl Sunday and only the ultra-spiritual, truly faithful, highly chosen ones would be here. Now relax, those of you listening on CD, because you missed worship, enamored with the false and superficial glory of this world, so clearly manifest in the supposed "Super Bowl"... God still loves you. We'll break our series because of that, but also because I wanted to talk a bit about us... our vision and strategy here at The Sanctuary. I'll encourage the Super Bowl lovers to listen online or read the manuscript. Because we'd been talking about different options for the future, last week I wrote a letter about our calling as a church. Frances liked it, and referred to it in her House Church devotional last week. The devotional was on seed sown in the soil of our hearts, and how God grows a church. I'd like to keep talking about that tonight by looking at an immensely important passage. And I think you'll see it also fits well with our stuff from Genesis.

First, let's pray:

Father, thank you that you have chosen us... that you have called us into your presence to see you. And to worship. In Jesus name, I pray that that would truly happen. Amen.

Film Clip: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

God appears in the clouds and speaks to Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

GOD: Arthur! Arthur, King of the Britons! Oh, don't grovel!
If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people groveling.

ARTHUR: Sorry--

GOD: And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone it's "sorry this" and "forgive me that" and "I'm not worthy". What are you doing now?

ARTHUR: I'm averting my eyes, oh Lord.

GOD: Now knock it off!

ARTHUR: Yes, Lord.

GOD: Right! Arthur, King of the Britons -- your Knights of the Round Table shall have a task to make them an example in these dark times.

ARTHUR: Good idea, oh Lord!

GOD: 'Course it's a good idea! Behold! Arthur, this is the Holy Grail. Look well, Arthur, for it is your sacred task to seek this Grail. That is your purpose, Arthur -- the Quest for the Holy Grail.

“Good idea, Oh Lord... of course’s a good idea.”

Well, that brilliant clip raises an interesting question: “How would you behave if God suddenly manifest before you in all of His Glory, like in Matthew 17?”

Matthew 17:1 *“And after six days...”* (came the 7th).

That’s important, for on the 7th day, creation is done. “It is finished.” It’s what we remember every 7th day, when we gather to worship.

Matthew 17:1 *“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.”*

1. In Exodus, Moses climbs the mountain and the Glory Cloud covers the mountain. He waits 6 days and on the 7th day, God speaks. The Law.
2. The Prophet Elijah also climbed that same mountain, and God spoke, telling Elijah to prophecy.
3. When Moses was on the mountain the consuming fire was incredible, and the people were so afraid, they asked that God not speak directly to them.
4. So God had Moses build a tabernacle (a sanctuary, a booth) so that God could dwell among His people without killing them.
5. The Tabernacle is also called the Sanctuary (the Holy Place).
6. Solomon eventually turns it into the stone temple in Jerusalem.
7. The last book of the Old Testament ends with this prophecy from Malachi 3 & 4:
*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.
But who can stand when he appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers soap...
The Son of Righteousness.*
Then Malachi tells them to remember the Law of Moses and look for the return of the Prophet Elijah.

Matthew 17

On the 7th day Jesus led them up a high mountain.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

“As no fuller could bleach them” adds Mark.

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish I will make three tents (literally “three tabernacles”) here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

They saw no one but Jesus only.

No one but Jesus.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

"Don't go tell it on the mountain, over the hills or anywhere."

In the Gospels, Jesus tells his disciples not to tell more than he tells them to tell. In fact, He just told them not to tell in the last chapter, Matthew 16.

Jesus asks, "Who do men say that I am?"

And Peter says, "You're the Christ, Son of the Living God."

Jesus says "Blessed are you, flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of Hell will not stand against it..." Then he strictly charges them to tell no one. And now he strictly charges them to tell no one...

Not until they climb one more mountain.

They'll climb it on a Friday.

The end of the 6th day and the doorway to the 7th day.

Well now on the "Mount of Transfiguration," Jesus morphs in front of them. He's on fire with glory and all history, the law and the prophets crash together in this moment. The glory of God descends and what does Peter do?

He says: "Good idea, Oh Lord."

"It's good that we're here. I agree!"

And then he says "Would you like me to build three tabernacles? Three sanctuaries?"

God Himself says basically "Peter, Peter... shut up! Look and listen. This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

What is Peter thinking?

Well, this is what I want you to do. Turn to 2 or 3 other people and answer these questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Who will win the Super Bowl?
3. What was Peter thinking? Why did he want to build sanctuaries?

Congregational Answers to #3:

It's in the budget!

He was just being Peter.

That's what they always did -- put God in a box.

To provide a gathering place.

God wanted to see him fail, so He made him say it.

To provide a holy place to capture the experience.

Well, the Gospel of Mark tells us that Peter was "terrified and didn't know what to say."

So out of anxiety, Peter says, “Let’s build religious buildings.”

Remember the word “tabernacle” implies more than a tent or a booth. The tabernacle was the sanctuary, in which God’s presence and glory moved with Israel in the wilderness.

Now God didn’t want them to do it, but David and Solomon turned the tabernacle into the immense stone temple. And reading Scripture, you can see why: Having that much power and glory in your midst is dangerous. You don’t store weapons grade plutonium in a tent. You store it in a stone bunker.

Well Jesus’ face is shining like the Sun... God’s glory is descending.

Peter feels out of control. He wants to control and contain all this glory, and the best container He can build is a tabernacle.

Peter desperately wants some walls.

Both physical walls and mental walls.

He wants to contain the glory and comprehend the glory.

He says, “Let me build three tabernacles...”

He wants to parse it, dissect it and compartmentalize this experience.

It would have been better if he had said “one tabernacle.” For Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus. But Peter’s trying to dissect it in order to comprehend it and explain it and judge it.

It’s comical how we think God needs our judgments... our approval.

Peter says, “Lord it’s good that we’re here.”

“Good idea, oh Lord.”

“Of course it’s a good idea.”

You know, a denomination is like a man-made tabernacle -- an effort to contain and comprehend the Glory of God.

So God’s glory will manifest in some way, like folks suddenly speaking in tongues or repenting.

And immediately we feel the need to:

- Build containers for the Spirit
- Teach classes on How the Glory Works
- Build walls to judge who’s in and who’s out
- Take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and build a religion

See, out of anxiety and fear, Peter gets religious. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Maybe he’s thinking, “I better fulfill the law and the prophets.” I better do something. The Glory of God appears and he looks to himself, thinking, “I’d better do something.”

The world tells me “I’d better do something”.

But what if “I” am the problem?

In the Old Testament the glory of I AM fills the temple. Now Peter sees the Glory of Yahweh (I Am that I Am), but Peter can't find the temple in which to place the glory.

The Lord whom we seek has suddenly come to his temple. But Peter can't find the temple.

So he thinks he better build the temple.

He better do something.

He better do something... On the Sabbath. The 7th day.

Peter wants containment and comprehension. He feels responsible and religious. You see, I think he's trying to build the church, where everybody can gather. Remember it was just the last chapter when Jesus said to Peter "You're the rock and on this rock I will build my church."

"I will build my church."

I think Peter must have heard "You will build my church."

But Jesus said, "I will build my church on a rock that is you." Like "Peter, you're one of the 1st stones in my temple. A sanctuary of living stones."

Do you get it?

Peter cannot build the church. Why?...

Because he is the church.

Peter cannot build the temple, for he is the temple.

He cannot build the sanctuary, for he is the sanctuary.

Peter cannot fulfill the law and the prophets, for Jesus has already fulfilled the law and the prophets from the foundation of the earth, and will fulfill them in Peter. Peter cannot comprehend the mystery, but the mystery, even now, is comprehending Peter.

Peter can't build a container for God's glory with his deeds, for Peter is a container for God's glory, built by God's deed – Grace.

He's a container for grace, to be filled with grace. Who is God.

Just like a bride is filled by her groom.

Just like a grail is filled with wine.

Just like a body is filled with blood.

The problem is: Peter is full of himself and so he thinks the glory must come from himself. I think that's why on the way down, Jesus says "Guys, don't tell anybody. Not yet."

For it's a tragedy to seek the glory of God and not know what it is. It's a tragedy to search the world seeking the Holy Grail, and not know what one is... to search the world for the container of God's life, and not know what it is. It's a tragedy to spend all your energy building churches and not know what one is. To build a sanctuary and not know that the sanctuary is what you are: a tragedy and a travesty.

A travesty... because the Jerusalem we build is a lie about the Jerusalem that God builds.
The Sanctuary we build hides the sanctuary God builds.

Sometimes the church we build is the direct enemy of the church God builds. It's the beast, the religion of the Anti-Christ – the false Christ.

St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is the most famous church in Christendom. Supposedly St. Peter is buried there. But it's not the church Jesus built on Peter. In the 16th Century, Pope Leo X offered indulgences for the building of that church. Many bought indulgences thinking they were buying salvation. It's the lie directly opposed to grace.

And we Protestants aren't any better. We build buildings based on tithe money obtained through fear. So we build our church of law and fear by lying about God's church built by Grace. Sometimes, as in war, we even kill God's church to defend our church.

So Jesus says "Guys, don't talk about the vision till you've gone up one more mountain." And He speaks to them about His death. You see, that other mountain is Mount Calvary.

And on that mountain they'll be emptied of themselves, so they can be filled with God.
They'll be emptied of their dreams, so they can become God's dream
They'll be emptied of this world's glory, so they can be filled with God's glory.

It's a tragedy that we seek glory and we don't even know what it is.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of doing several chapels for the Broncos. The first year I did it, they went to the Super Bowl, and I'm pretty sure that's why... my chapel. It's fun to do chapel because I get to have breakfast with them, and go to the game. The year Invesco Field opened, I remember walking out down by the field. The lights came on. People were chanting. Everyone yelling. I mean, the place was electric – awesome. I was being swept away, when this thought was whispered into my soul:

"Peter, you just wait. You just wait. You just wait for my glory. Until you hear "every creature in heaven and on earth, and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them" cheering for my glory. My glory is a slaughtered lamb, standing on my throne."

The radiance of God's glory is "Jesus Christ and him crucified for the sins of the world." God's glory is grace—unquenchable, unending, unbounded, white-hot grace.

See, the Mount of Transfiguration is only the edge of glory. Mount Calvary is the heart of glory and where the church is built.

Where the bride is built from Adam's bleeding side.
His body broken and blood shed.
His Righteousness.

So if we trust our own righteousness to build the sanctuary, God can't build us into His sanctuary. For it's the sanctuary of grace. And when you see that, it entirely changes your religious experience.

This was on Oprah last week:

Video Clip from the Oprah show:

Ted Haggard: “I believe Jesus came to redeem us from our sins. After going through this experience, I think everybody is equally in need of redemption. And I know, first-hand experience, that he loves unrighteous people. When I couldn’t seek Him anymore, He came and got me. And boy did my religious experience change. Before I thought, “Seek the Lord, seek the Scripture, seek all that.” But when He sought me, I was able to rest...”

Oprah: “How did He seek you? How did Jesus seek you?”

Haggard: “I was dying. I had settled in my mind exactly how I was going to commit suicide. I knew I was an embarrassment to my children. I was a shame to my church. I had negated everything that I had taught and believed, although I thought they were true, but by my foolishness I had done that. And so I was preparing. And in my life Jesus came to me and He said, “Now we’re ready. Now I can save you.”

“Now we’re ready. Now I can save you.” Isn’t that amazing? That’s Ted Haggard, former pastor of the largest church in Colorado, author of numerous books and president of the National Association of Evangelicals. In my mind, Ted built an awesome church. But just a few months ago, as Ted prepared to kill himself, Jesus appeared to him and said “Now we’re ready. Now I can save you.”

You may be cynical, and I don’t know exactly what happened with Ted Haggard, but that sounds just like something Jesus would say. “Now we’re ready. Now I can save you.”

Does that mean Ted Haggard wasn’t saved before? No, I don’t think so.

Does it mean New Life Church wasn’t Christ’s church before? No, I don’t think so.

Does it mean we have to commit some big sin like Ted Haggard or deny Jesus three times like Peter, before God will build us into His church. No, I don’t think so.

But it does mean God’s method of building the church is very different than ours.

In fact, we can’t build the church. Jesus does.

And so you’ve got to ask, “Is there anything we can do?”

The answer is “Yes.” “Yes.”

First and foremost, we can do nothing.

Let me put it another way: There is “nothing” that we can do. And if we do nothing well, God will do everything well... in us, through us and to us.

Now I know I sound like a Kung Fu master smokin’ a joint... on a late night made-for-TV movie. But just look at the life of Peter:

Peter’s talking away, trying to build the church out of pride, responsibility and fear.

And God stops him.
shābat – sabbath – stop
While Peter is talking, God interrupts him.

You know all suffering is God interrupting our plans and our procedures, and our efforts to make ourselves in God's image.

All suffering and Sabbath.
Suffering is an enforced Sabbath.
Sabbath is to stop, to end. And Jesus is the end.

And God says "Peter, stop. This is my beloved son. Look at Him. Listen to Him. Surrender to Him." That's how we're transformed into the image of God. That's how the church is built.

Paul writes:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17-18)

We've been talking about looking into the mirror of the law, in which we see ourselves, and looking into the mirror of grace, in which we see Christ.

You know, a bride can analyze herself in a mirror for all eternity, and she won't get pregnant. We're the bride, the sacred feminine, the grail to be filled with the life of the groom. A bride can't get pregnant by looking at herself in a mirror. But if a bride looks in the mirror that is her bridegroom's eyes, if she looks in his face and surrenders in worship, stuff happens.

Worship feels a lot like doing nothing, but that's how fruit happens. That's how the bride gets pregnant.

So we have this motto at The Sanctuary; it's on the website:

"Jesus is our vision and worship is our strategy."

But now check this out: If I'm looking in Jesus' eyes, He's looking in my eyes. He sees Himself in my eyes, so:

*"Jesus is our vision and worship is our strategy."
And "We are Jesus' vision, and we (the church) are His strategy."*

He said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

So Peter tries to build the church till he's literally floored by the glory of God. Jesus picks him up and Peter sees only Jesus. That's only one degree of glory. But there's more.

He follows Jesus to the next mountain – mount Zion, mount Calvary, Jerusalem.

And on the 6th day, in the upper room, Jesus takes bread and breaks it saying, "This is my body, given to you." And He takes a cup saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is for you." That night, Peter

denies Jesus three times, for all of Peter's plans for glory are interrupted by God's glory. Jesus is crucified.

He had said, "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified." (John 12)

As Jesus' body is ripped apart on the cross, the veil in the temple, veiling God's glory, the veil is ripped from top to bottom. On Mt. Calvary, Jesus is glorified. Peter is utterly undone and emptied.

Three days later, Jesus appears to Peter, picks him up and Peter sees "nothing but Jesus." Then Jesus commands Peter and the others to do nothing... to wait. For several weeks, days, in that same upper room where Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine, they wait. They worship. They pray.

On the day of Pentecost, the feast of the first fruits, suddenly the glory of God fills the temple. The glory of God fills the bride, the Grail, the New Jerusalem, the tabernacle, the Sanctuary, the people of God, the church.

In downtown Jerusalem, there are people from every nation in the city, this glorious mix. And in the upper room, there is wind and fire and miracles. The upper room provides "just enough structure for good things to run wild." They speak in all these foreign tongues, so there are no walls between the nations and God. They are a church without walls. It's like Zechariah prophesied: "And I will be to her a wall of fire all around," declares the Lord, "and I will be the glory in her midst."

Peter, the coward, stands up and preaches grace to all and for all. Three thousand are baptized that day. They devote themselves to the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and to prayers. And they share all things in common. And they change the world.

And do you see?

Peter didn't do it.

Jesus did it... on Peter.

He built His church on Peter. He still is right now.

Jesus is our vision and worship is our strategy. For we are Jesus' vision and we (the church) are His strategy.

And therefore our first priority is to do "nothing" well. That is to start each week and everything with the Sabbath. It's more than a worship service, but it's expressed in the service. It's to look at Jesus, listen to Jesus and ingest Jesus. His body broken and blood shed. It's The glory of God. It's the food that fuels us, the seed that finds its place in us.

So if we do that nothing well, I expect Him to do everything well in us. I expect us to get pregnant with His life, to move in the power of His grace.

So we've structured The Sanctuary in the hope that the things we do would grow out of our corporate worship, rather than the religious anxiety in Pastor Peter, Frances and Justin's heads. We don't want to dictate programs from the top down so much as nurture things that grow from the ground up.

And that's why we meet in House Churches once a month:

First, to remind you: You are the church. You are the sanctuary. You don't need me or this building.

Secondly: You are the church. God's Spirit dwells in you. If you feel God calling you to do something, do it. For instance, I think prayer partners are great. But I don't want to build a Prayer Partner Program. Instead, ask someone at your House Church, "Hey, you wanna get together and pray?" I think small groups are great. I wish everyone was in one. If you want one, ask some folks at your House Church. If you need materials, Bible studies, whatever, we can help you.

I think ministry programs, service programs, recovery programs, fellowship programs... are great, but in my experience, all the best ones grow from the ground up. Through His Word, God creates a person with passion. They include others in their passion, like the rest of their House Church. Then maybe it grows to include all of us. But you see, it grows from the broken soil of your heart, and the grace of God implanted there. So pray and ask what He's growing in your heart. It may include all of us.

But no matter what, you are the church.

And no matter where you go, that is your ministry.

I get concerned that we neurotic, busy Americans work so hard to build the church that we no longer take time to be the church.

The true church isn't something we try to be, it's something we are.

On judgment day, the sheep aren't even aware that they served Jesus. They will say, "Lord, when did we welcome you? When did we see you sick and in prison?" You see, I don't think they were trying to build the church; they just were the church. They weren't looking in the mirror at themselves; they were just worshipping Jesus.

Well, I don't know exactly where we're headed. I don't know if we'll be big or small. I don't know if we'll always rent a building, or someday buy a building. I don't know what programs we'll grow and ministries we'll spawn. I don't know what we'll do.

But I know we'll do everything He wants us to do,
if we just stop, look, and listen to Jesus.

"Behold, the glory of God." (Peter points to the bread and wine.)

Look. Listen.

He says, "This is my body, given to you."

What would you do if the glory of God suddenly manifest in your midst? Lighter cups are wine, darker cups are juice. They are both the glory of God.

Communion

Prayer: Jesus, transform us from the inside out. And thank you that that's your desire... for you make our inside your home, your Sanctuary. And we thank you, Lord God, in Jesus name. Amen.

Benediction

Now before you go, let me say, this message makes me insecure. Does that make sense, why it makes me insecure? I think first, because I'm kind of saying that I don't have control. And secondly, because I'm a professional... you pay me. So I feel like I should have control. Like I should be able to come up with a whole bunch of charts and graphs about where we'll be, and how we'll do this and that... and manage the whole thing. The reality is, I can do that. I got mostly A's in Seminary. And I'm pretty smart. But I've been around the church a long time. I grew up in the church. I've been around all sorts of church disasters, church successes. And what I've found is the only thing that's real... the only thing that's lasting, is the fruit He grows in broken hearts. And when He does that, all kinds of amazing programs happen. I've seen them. Things like Healing Waters, Street's Hope, Unbridled Acts. God is doing all sorts of things. And even better, the things that happen at the coffee shop or when you just talk to somebody on the street.

What I'm trying to say, and why I think this is so important, is:

You really are the church.

The Spirit of God really lives inside of you.

He really is talking to you.

He really will change this world through you. And that's not a curse. That's a blessing.

He's saying to His children, "Come, let's go do it together." And He does it in you, through you and to you. You're His Sanctuary, His body, His people.

In Jesus' name, believe the gospel.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.