ABC Christmas	**3rd of** **Ten Big Ideas of Christian Faith:** **The Incarnation** **(God Among Us)** John 1.14 (also could be revised to fit Matt 1.18-25, which is A 4Advent) by Tim Isbell	Preached 12/23/2007 at New Life; and 12/22/2013 at Watsonville Nazarene

Thesis: From the beginning God has desired to live among his people.

Reader:

In Watsonville, the tradition is for someone other than the preacher to read a scripture before the sermon. Where this is the case, ask them to introduce the scripture and then read it. For example: "Beginning from Matthew 1.18... <read the verses 18-25>. And John 1.14 <read the verse>."

Otherwise, for this sermon it is a good idea to start by reading this passage yourself.

(If you're preaching this as part of the 10 Big Ideas sermon series, you may want to remind the congregation of the concept of the series.)

Old Testament tabernacle

T's question

(In case you are using this sermon, you probably want to know something about T. He's a 30-year-old Chinese engineer who is from Taiwan, but has a Japanese name. He was involved in some start-up companies in Silicon Valley but most of the time he lived in Shanghai. When he visited the States we would often play golf. Over a few years of this some spiritual conversations developed, he began investigating Christian faith mostly by long distance with me, and eventually I had the privilege of baptizing him at New Life. He now lives in Taiwan, is married and they have one child. It is a Christian family.

So… at one point on T's journey to faith he was reading Exodus. After finishing the book, he asked, "Why does God only allow Moses to see Him and why does God perform miracles and teachings only through Moses? Could God teach the Israelites more directly so ordinary people will not sin? I think there were possibly people that just didn't trust Moses from time to time. If these people saw or heard God directly, they would not have turned away from God.")

Just 2 months after God freed Israelites from slavery…

They arrived at Mt. Sinai and set up camp at its base. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God.

God told Moses about his plans to make the Israelites a nation of priests for the whole world, IF they would obey his commands AND trust him enough to follow him. Moses descended down the mountain and told this to the people; they responded that they would trust and obey God!

So the people got cleaned up, put on their best clothes and prepared to meet the Lord at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

In the process, the people experience the thunder of the Lord's voice and sense his holiness when he warns them not to come too close or they will surely die. The people panic.

Read Exodus 20:18-19 (NLT) [18] When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear. [19] And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!"

That's basically the answer to T's question.

God wanted a close relationship with the people, but they asked for a middle-man. God gave them what they asked. But God was still interested in living as close to his people as possible, so… 5 chapters later:

Exodus 25:1, 8 (NLT) [1] The Lord said to Moses… [8] "Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them."

(If you're using a tent to illustrate this sermon, this is a good point to set it up - probably off in a corner of the platform.)

The sanctuary was called a tabernacle; it was essentially a tent.

A little later in Exodus, we find the location of this sanctuary:

Exodus 33:7-11 (NLT)[7] It was Moses' practice to take the Tent of Meeting and set it up some distance from the camp. Everyone who wanted to make a request of the Lord would go to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp. [8] Whenever Moses went out to the Tent of Meeting, all the people would get up and stand in the entrances of their own tents. They would all watch Moses until he disappeared inside. [9] As he went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and hover at its entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses. [10] When the people saw the cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, they would stand and bow down in front of their own tents. [11] Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward Moses would return to the camp, but the young man who assisted him, Joshua the son of Nun, would remain behind in the Tent of Meeting.

Later in the Old Testament the Israelites got possession of permanent land. Eventually God has King Solomon replace the tabernacle with a stone temple. That's how it was all through the Old Testament: God was as near the Israelites as they wanted.

(As an object lesson, I set up a tent on platform.)

There were strict rules on entering the Tent. Especially the innermost part where God's presence resided. Only the high priest, and only once a year, could enter. Before

entering he had to go through an extensive cleansing process! It was a high-risk job.

(Tell about the rope, bell.)

For centuries this was as close as God got to his average follower. There was always a middle man – a priest like Moses, as the interface between God and his people.

Eventually this changed with the coming of God in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament tabernacle

John 1:14 (YLT) [14] And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth.

Move tent to middle of congregation, and open the flap wide.

(To do this, of course, requires some open space in the middle of the congregation. Until this point in the message the parishioners noticed this open space but had no idea what it was for.)

So, now what does God want from us?

For us to come into a full and personal relationship with him. He has had this in mind since before time began.

We must prepare ourselves for this also, but not by ceremonial washing and offering sacrifices and putting on our best clothes, but by

- Trusting the sacrifice of Jesus for forgiveness of our sin,
- And living as apprentices to Jesus.

When we do, God gives the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts to enable us to do in our world the same sorts of things that Jesus did in the 1st century world. In this way, WE become a part of the body of Christ in our world.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NLT) [12] The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. [13] Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. [14] ... [27] All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

Today God wants us to continue the tradition of pitching our tents in the middle of our world just like Jesus did.

Then he wants us to live like the apprentices to Jesus that we are – to follow his example. We learn how to do this from reading the gospels and paying attention to Jesus' life, and following the leading of the Spirit of Jesus within us.

For example, let's take a look at the gospel of John:

In John 1.37-39 Andrew & John – fishermen – were just standing there. They knew a little about Jesus. When Jesus walked by they sensed God's Spirit in him. So they came

and asked him, “Where do you live?”

Jesus replied, “Come and see.”

Today, as Jesus’ Spirit lives in us, and we pitch our tents among people. Some will notice a difference in us, and ask about it. God designs our lives for this to happen. It’s why Christ followers live out their lives transparently in front of all to see.

And when it does, we are to do exactly what Jesus did: invite them to “come and see.” It means opening our lives to the inquirers whose lives intersect with ours.

In John 2, Jesus showed up at a wedding in Cana - and he even helped out. We can do this, too. Show up at times of celebration of people around us: weddings, graduations, birthday parties, if our neighbor gets a new car go over and have a look at it, and so on. It’s part of pitching our tents among people just like Jesus did. (in other gospels, he also showed up at funerals)

In John 3, Nicodemus had noticed something different in Jesus, so he came to inquire (like T). It’s an example of Jesus making time to talk with professionals about spiritual things. You and I can do this; many of us have opportunities every month. As the professionals around us sense God’s Spirit in our lives they’ll eventually ask something about what makes us tick. It is God opening a door for us to enter a spiritual conversation.

In John 4, there’s the Samaritan woman story. Jesus deliberately goes far out of his way to pass through Samaria, an unsafe, unfriendly region - especially for Jews. While there he stops at a well and asks a marginalized woman from another culture (Samaritan woman) to give him a drink. It led to a spiritual conversation about living water.

Some of us can do this sort of thing: rearranging our schedule a bit and being willing to engage people who might be a bit shy about engaging us.

Pastor David did this. He wanted to get to know his neighbor across the street, but realized that if he just knocked on the door the reception would be cool. One day David noticed the neighbor’s schedule of watering and working in his front yard at about the same time each week. So David arranged to water and tinker in his own front yard at that time. You and I can do this sort of thing, too.

In John 5, there’s a man who was sick for 38 yrs. Jesus gave him attention, asked him, “Would you like to get well… really?” Then healed him right there. The man didn’t even know Jesus’ name! This was one of many healings! You and I can do this, too. We can give people our attention. We may not be able to heal the person ourselves, but we know someone who can, and his Spirit is within us. So we might ask if it’s okay to pray for their healing.

In John 6, Jesus fed more than 5,000 people because he cared that they were hungry. The Bible says Jesus saw a huge crowd coming to him and he anticipated their needs. So he fed them. Not all by himself. He recruited his apprentices to play a big role. We can do this, too. It doesn’t take much of an IQ to anticipate that people are going to get hungry a few times a day. It’s part of pitching our tent among people.

I was in a Panda Express eating dinner a few weeks ago and noticed Doug, a homeless guy in my area, milling around outside. I went out and asked if he was hungry, he said he

was, so I took him in and fed him. Just last week I had the same experience with Doug at a Subway… Doug is obviously mentally ill, but Jesus would stop and feed him, and treat him like the valuable person he is. We can do the same, and even though we may not be able to have a quality conversation with the Doug-s of this world, we can pray for them.

(Could also tell about New Life's Tender Touch Bags. These were bags we stuffed with essentials to give to homeless people we ran into around town. They were especially designed for people living on the street. The idea was for every parishioner to have 2-3 of these in their car so that whenever they saw a homeless or hungry person, instead of not knowing what to do they could hand them a Tender Touch Bag. Then, either with the recipient or not, as soon as possible stop and pray for the person.)

In John 8, Jesus meets a woman caught in adultery. Others were condemning her, brought her to Jesus wanting him to join in the condemnation. Instead of piling on more condemnation he protected her, offered her forgiveness, and gave her a new direction. We can do this, too. We who are forgiven and are filled with God's Spirit find it easy to lead a person who feels condemned to the one who can forgive them… and do it without ourselves condemning them!

In John 9, Jesus answered a question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Neither, it was so God could be glorified. We can do this, too. Believe it or not, as God's Spirit fills us there come times when someone we know opens their life up for us and starts asking questions about the ways of Jesus. It's what is happening with my friend, T.

Jn 1.43, Jesus says, "Come, follow me." He invited us into his Alternate Kingdom. We who accept his invitation to get into the game are "licensed" to invite others in, too. We can do this, too.

This 3rd big idea: God incarnating himself in his creation

God unfolds this idea to us from the beginning of the Old Testament… through Jesus, the Christ… and throughout 2000 years of Christian history.

And it will continue to unfold until the end of time.

Revelation 21:3 (NLT) [3] I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.

It's what God always wanted: to live among us.

- He's made all the provisions for us to live as the incarnated Jesus in the present age.
- It is only for us to receive Jesus and become his apprentices, not just admirers.

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Presentation. (Similar to PowerPoint)