

Tabernakel #2: white curtain & entrance (Ex27)

Sermon	
Passage	Ex27,9-19
Place & date	Denver Oct 14, 2007
Title	
Series	Tabernakel #2
Point of the <i>sermon</i> (present tense, personal, contemporary)	Why the white fence? - the fence reminds us that God is holy - the door means that God invites us to come inside
Goal	- to give people a new grasp on what it means to draw near to the holy God - to invite believers who struggle with sin to come to Jesus.

LITURGY

Begin:	Ps 96,1-3	before sermon:	Hymn 2,1.2.4.5	end	Ps 131
law / grace:	Ps 51,3.4	after sermon:	Ps 118,5-7		

THEME

Theme	God tells us that his house is special
1	Stop!
2	Come in!

Congregation / believers / disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Ruth and her brother Samuel are walking in the tent camp in the desert. There is a lot to see: many tents, animals everywhere, the neighbors just go young goats, women are baking bread with the mannah that fell that morning.

It is busy. But some time ago it was even busier: the men were building, sawing, making large curtains, they were even pouring gold and silver. All those things were for the tabernacle, a special tent for God.

And now it was all done.

Ruth says to Samuel: 'I'd like to see what it looks like. We went to the feast last week to celebrate the new tabernacle, but I couldn't see anything. There were too many people. Let's go take a look!'

So they walk to the place where the tent is, in the middle of the camp.
But when they get there, they don't see the tent.
Where is it?

All they see is a fence. And it is so high: 'I can't reach the top with my hand!' says Ruth.

They follow the curtain for a while but when they turn a corner the curtain only continues. There is nothing else they see.
Ruth wants to go on, but Samuel is tired. He wants to go home.

At home dad asks them what they have done.

They tell him they went to the tent but couldn't find it. 'There was a huge white fence around it. It was too high. We could see anything!' says Ruth.

Dad says: 'Yeah, that's a pity! You must be disappointed. The tent is there, but the curtain shows us it is special. It is not like *our* homes where you can just run through the door. We always need to remember that we are meeting with God when we go there.

You did not see it, but there is a door. I will show it to you the next time we go there. It is huge: that tells you that you can come in. God invites you to come and meet with him.'

Their dad just summarized the message of the curtain:

God tells us that his house is special

1. Stop!
2. Come in!

1. Stop!

God told Moses that he wanted his people to build him a house to live in their midst. Next door.

So the tabernacle was built, everything was done according to God's plan, and when the whole building is finished, what do you see?

A white fence.

It's 7.5 feet tall – that's about as high as the walls in your home or the church.
None of us is tall enough to look over the top.

You can't see everything!

When you walked towards the tabernacle the fence was the thing that drew your attention. Maybe we don't realize this because the pictures we have show it from the air as if from we are in a helicopter, looking down; but the Israelites never saw it that way.

Only if they were standing on a hill or climbed on a rock they could see it like that. But in normal life all they saw was a wall of white cloth and maybe the roof of the tabernacle and the cloud hanging over it.

Why a curtain around the tabernacle?

The fence is white. It stands out in the desert.

When the U.S. Army makes camp in the desert during a mission they use camouflage tents so they blend in.

But white stands out in the sand. All the more because of the thousands of brown tents that surrounded it.

This white fence formed the boundary of the courtyard.

God claims space for himself within this white rectangle.

He builds his home in the center of the camp, but it is a holy space.

The curtain is made of white linen, a sign of purity and holiness.

Stop - holy ground!

Everyone who wants to meet God is stopped by the curtain.

Wait – think. Who are you? Whom are you meeting?

God created such a moment when he called Moses.

Moses was in the desert, tending the sheep.

Then he saw a bush on fire.

‘Strange’, he thought, ‘the bush is not consumed, it doesn’t disappear. It remains on fire!’

So he went to check it out.

Then God called him and said:

“Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

God is holy. And the place where he is, even if he is there only temporarily, is holy.

It reflects God’s house in the heavens. When Isaiah saw God’s glory in heaven in a vision, what was the first thing he saw?

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Think about this: what are the angels doing, the creatures who live in God’s presence day and night?

We know they have wings, which carry them everywhere to carry out every command of God.

But did you know they have not two, but six wings? With those wings they respond to God’s holiness; they cover their faces and their feet.

And this is their activity, this is what you hear when you step into God’s throne room:

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The angels were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

And they never stop.

The white curtain makes us stop and think and bow down before God. He is awesome in majesty and we should tremble before this holy God,
(pause)

How to approach God?

How do you respond to God? How do you approach him?

Coming to church can become a habit, a bore.

And how do you meet with God every day?

We run the risk that we say a quick prayer, grab a bite, and hop in the car because there is so much to do: our work, our sports, and all the things we want to do.

We push God out of our world because we are so busy with our lives.

The white curtain is there all the time to remind us: our lives are not about ourselves. God is in our midst and that makes the place special.

Often we don't think, we just assume God is there for us.

It can go this way: you've not thought of him for a long time; you've tried to solve things your way and you found out the hard way that it doesn't work. What do you do? You turn to him and expect him to flip a switch and - poof - things should change.

The white curtain brings us to a stop.

Who is the God we are meeting?

We have *lost* something if we don't know what Isaiah saw in heaven and if we fail to realize that this is the God we approach.

The Father of Jesus Christ is enthroned in heaven in holiness and glory.

The white curtain tells us: you are approaching God. The ground you stand on is holy.

(pause)

Holy ground. A curtain. It is not there to keep you out but to warn you: the God you are approaching is holy.

How should you respond to God's holiness?

We get used to going to church. It becomes part of your weekly routine.

Here in America it has even come to the point that churches try to make church seem as mundane and normal as buying a cup of coffee or doing your grocery shopping. Let's not make Christianity stand out, they think, so that people will not experience any difference. It must be as familiar as possible.

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And there is a grain of truth in it, of course: God comes into this world. We should not separate our faith from daily life. Religion must not become a holy corner in an otherwise secular life.

But the fact is: God is holy. His house is in the middle of our world, yes, but it never blends in with the shopping mall and will never become a Wal*Mart.

"This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."(Is 66.1-2)

Approaching God is a big deal. We don't have to try to draw God down into our world and make it seem as if nothing special is going on.

When you draw near to God the first thing you see is the white curtain.

Are you **humble**? Do you realize God is much greater than you, your job, your home, and your sports?

Are you **contrite in spirit**? That's a difficult word. It means that you feel really sorry for the things you've done wrong. Do you feel the pain of your sins? Are they a burden? They offend God.

And **trembling at God's word**, what's that?

It's not always comforting and affirming. It can cut like a knife. It wakes you up and makes you realize that you're on the wrong track.

(slow)

Sometimes we have a flash of insight: God is so great, the heavens so immense. I'm just this tiny spot and I'm thinking my concerns are sooo important?

God's Word brings God's holiness and majesty out and show you what's really going on. You get a sense of the proportions.

And you tremble when you realize how little you have understood and even less how little you live up to it.

Here is the comfort and encouragement in Isaiah's words: you don't have to be perfect before God accepts you. But everyone who believes in Jesus should begin to respond in this way: with humility and trembling:

(SLOW)

this holy God wants me ... in his presence!

The white curtain is a warning: realize whom you are going to meet. If you ignore the curtain you take away the wonder of meeting God.

But the curtain is not meant to become a wall that keeps you out. God did not pitch his tent in the midst of his people to remain at a distance, out of reach.

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He built this house to live with his people.

So the white curtain may be the first thing you see, but it is certainly not meant to become the last thing and make you turn around.

Go look for the entrance!

2. Come inside!

walk farther: there is a door!

Ruth and her little brother Samuel only saw the curtain. They began walking along the white fence but they didn't walk far enough to find the door.

Their dad knew where it was: on the short side of the courtyard that was turned to the sun. If you just walked in the direction of the morning sun you would find the door easily enough.

And what a door it is. It's unlike any door you've seen before.

The two shorter sides of the enclosure are 75 feet long. The door is 30 feet wide. That's almost half of side of the courtyard! This door is much wider than it is high.

God is inviting you: come in!

The door was open for everyone.

If you had sinned, this was the place to go.

Others had something to thank God for and they came through the same opening.

People with an illness went through it to see the priest: am I healed? Can I worship God again?

Everyone was invited. God opened his door for respected leaders and poor sinners alike.

It is not a narrow door that only admits a special few.

That's what we often make God out to be: that he is stingy and rather sends people away.

When we see few people coming to church we can begin to think: 'indeed, it's only for a few.'

There is even a Bible text that fits: many are called but few are chosen.

Well, not so fast. Many are called!

God's invitation is for everybody. The gospel message is meant for the whole world.

Ever since Jesus came and the Holy Spirit filled the church, the whole world literally means 'the whole world'. Jews and gentiles alike are called.

This is Peter's message on the day of Pentecost – and let me put it in the words of the KJV:

"whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts2.21KJV)

I like that word, it's beautiful: whosoever: anybody!

We should not think some people are outside of the range of the gospel. Nobody is too bad, nobody is hopeless.

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We should never limit the preaching of the gospel to a group that seems more deserving. And we should never be silent about the gospel when we meet people of whom we think 'Nah, they won't hear. They'll never like it. They are not the kind of people...'

Nobody is the kind of people that likes the gospel. We are all sinners!
The white curtain tells us that we need it, you and I and the neighbors next door.
God is calling all his creatures. He opens the door to his holy home.

And how does he do this? In Jesus.

Jesus is the door

In this door we recognize Jesus. Didn't he call himself the door, saying:

"I am the gate of the sheep; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."?

When you are impressed, even scared by the whiteness, the purity of the curtain surrounding God's house, Jesus stretches out his hand and invites you: 'Come in, I have made it possible for you to enter. I have taken away God's wrath over your sins with my blood.'

His words are a sincere invitation, to you and me and everyone else:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt 11.28-30 NIV)

Come to me.

This is not a strange door you're knocking on.

It is not an unknown distant God you are approaching.

The door is Jesus.

The God who is inviting you is his Father.

"Come to me and I will give you rest!"

When you trust in Jesus, the only sacrifice for your sins, the path to God is easy and wide.

The door opens / gives access

You can see Jesus even in the way the door is described.

There is not just an opening in the linen curtain.

Instead, there is a different curtain, but not one to stop you. The priest will hold it up for you, or you can just lift it yourself and step inside.

When you get closer you will see that it has four colors. Not four layers, one on top of the other. No, the door is one curtain embroidered with four colors, so that you see all four colors at the same time. (see the picture in the bulletin)

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Everyone who enters must notice: what a **bright colors** in this white fence! What do they mean?

The colors return in the other curtains in the tabernacle.

You find these colors many times in the Bible. They are full of symbolism. They speak of Jesus and encourage you to trust in him and follow him:

a) Scarlet is the color of blood

Scarlet was used to dye cloth and leather bright red. If you drop just one drop on a white sheet you see it stain that you can't remove any more.

This is how the Bible speaks about our sins:

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Is 1.18 NIV)

Jesus' blood cleanses us from every sin – any sin!

When you've come to God asking for forgiveness for the umpteenth time, you may begin to wonder: I'm hopeless. Will God forgive me again? God will see you coming...

Maybe you have committed a sin that you don't want anybody to know. It has devastated your life.

The devil will try to make you believe: no chance – forget it! God will not let this one go.

Then turn to God and grab hold of that curtain with the scarlet in it.

Plead with God on the basis of Jesus' blood! His scarlet blood will cover the bright scarlet stain of your sins that you thought would never disappear.

The curtain reminds you: Jesus' blood is powerful enough to redeem the sins of the whole world – your sins included.

b) White linen

There is white in this curtain, too. Not a white that keeps you out or warns you that you are not holy enough. This time the white is the white of the cloths Jesus hands out to you.

You see this in Rev19:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)” (Rev 19.7-8 NIV)

Jesus' bride will be ready. Not by anything she has done. This is the dress Jesus gives to his bride. The righteous acts of the saints are given by Jesus. This is how we live every day: not by our own strength, not trying to please God in order that he will accept us.

Instead, Jesus calls you to hold out your hands and receive these righteous acts and live for him.

Don't begin thinking, not even after many years of serving him, that your activities give you any right to be in God's presence. Not your 20 years of service, not the years I put in as a pastor, not your sincerity, or your strong witness for Christ can get us anywhere.

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You can come in the name of Jesus and he hands you these linen cloths that make you beautiful. Come to Jesus with this expectation: that he will dress you so you are dressed to meet the king.

When you push the curtain away, the white shows you what you can expect: the holiness and purity of Christ is yours.

c) Purple

This is the color of a king. When the soldiers were mocking Jesus before they crucified him they put a purple mantle on his shoulders.

This is a huge encouragement: Jesus has broken the power of sin and conquered the enemy! He is your king.

God proclaims his kingdom over your life, he claims it for himself.

Don't accept sin in your life any longer, do not accept defeat, thinking 'I'm a sinner and I always will be.'

No! Do not accept it. Step forward, open the curtain and notice the purple color. Jesus has overcome the power of sin and tells you: follow me!

This means that he places a claim on your life. You cannot call him Lord and ignore his will. When you approach God, the purple color proclaims God's kingdom and claims your life for himself. (Jesus says:)

"Do not just say 'Lord, Lord', but do my will, then you will enter my kingdom" The purple is a call to arms, following your king in his victory: fight against the power of sin in your life.

d) Blue: heaven

And then the blue: that's the call to heaven. That's where Jesus was from and where he returned. That's also your destination.

You're at the door of God's house, asking for forgiveness, but the blue in the door already tells you: I have more in store for you. My grace opens the door to heaven. Come into my house and you will never have to leave. My presence is everything.

Heaven is not fully here yet, but Jesus guarantees you: I will bring you there. Trust me.

Brothers and sisters, the white fence has a door.

When you stop to think and realize your situation, don't stop there but come to the door. It opens in Jesus' name. It is Jesus.

And then, the white fence becomes a rectangle of hope and life for you.

Amen