

**SERMON: 4 November 2018 – Rev Brenda Robson****“Tabernacle”  
(Hebrews 9:1–15)**

Frances Young and I attended a Christian event called Tabernacle about a month ago.

There were about 80 people there.

It took place at the Kings Factory Church at Culloden, Inverness- it was previously a fish factory. It has a beautiful worship space about the size of East Calder Church. - some carpets, some seats, sofas, bean bags, up to date lighting, sound system, excellent visuals

People along one side of the room were painting - some quite professional, some amateur, anyone can paint!

About 10 in the band - guitars, keyboard, lots of drums, violins, vocals

Some songs we knew but sometimes the lead singer would be asked to sing eg psalm 24, ye gates and would sing the verses, making it up, with musicians following.

The worship times had no order of service, in fact often no one knew quite where the worship time would go - and that means following where the Holy Spirit leads - maybe 2 hours long

Sometimes the worship was loud and noisy, sometimes there was silence, something else we're not too good at in church

At times people would wave banners and flags in beautiful colours, sometimes people would dance.

There weren't any rules – you could stand or sit or kneel, you could dance or sit on a sofa with your eyes closed and soak in the words of a song or a reading.

I said to Frances on Saturday morning as we headed to the church that it would be impossible to adequately describe to people the experience of Tabernacle, to communicate the joy and the freedom in worship. And the first thing the speaker said an hour later was. “Of course this Tabernacle gift is not just for you. You have to take it back to your churches and out into the world.”

Since coming back I've prayed about when I should speak about the Tabernacle. I did share some thoughts at the Break on the week after the event but I felt that it was to be shared more widely. Alistair asked me a couple of weeks ago if I would like to preach today and that was fine. When I went to the lectionary during last week to see what the readings are for today, there was Hebrews 9 – headed "Worship in the earthly tabernacle"

What is Tabernacle, what does it mean?

The Tabernacle is where God dwells, where God is to be found.

It is linked to the word tavern. Nowadays a tavern is associated with a public house but originally it was a travellers inn, a hotel, B&B, somewhere to find food and lodgings on a journey, a temporary dwelling until the destination is reached.

The Tabernacle in the Old Testament was a temporary dwelling for God.

The first Tabernacle was probably in the Garden of Eden, God's close presence with the people he had created. He was simply there with them, they saw him and were in close fellowship with him. There is a lovely picture of this relationship in Genesis 3 : 8 – **Then the man and his wife (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day....**

A better translation of the word cool here would be "wind" – God was walking in the garden in the wind of the day. But of course it goes on to say that Adam and Eve hid from God because they had sinned and from then on the relationship between God and Mankind was less straightforward.

People would no longer see God, in fact if they looked at God they would die. We read this several times in Exodus. Even Moses had to be shielded and protected when he entered the presence of God. But God wanted to dwell with his people and he wanted his people to be aware of his presence. And so he instructed Moses to build a Tabernacle.

The instructions were very specific and are detailed in Exodus 25 to 40.

The court of the tabernacle was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, surrounded by white linen held by 60 pillars of brass and silver. There was one gate facing east, of fine linen in purple and blue and red. There were two things in the court, the altar and the basin for ritual washing

The tabernacle itself was divided in two parts, the first part was the holy place and the inner part was the holy of holies or the most holy place. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. He was able to enter through the veil, a curtain of fine linen and embroidered in purple and red and blue. In the Holy of Holies stood the Ark of the Covenant which contained three things – a golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod and the tablets with the ten commandments. The Ark was just over a metre long, and less than a metre in height and width. The lid was the mercy seat and it had solid gold cherubim with arching wings on each side and there the very presence of God rested.

The Ark was moved from place to place during the 40 years that Moses led the people in the wilderness. When the people camped, their tents faced the Tabernacle on all sides. It was the centre of the camp. And this was a huge camp – I don't know what you imagine when you think of Moses and the people in the wilderness but there were somewhere between 2 and 6 million people. Every morning the people woke up to see God in the midst in the smoke rising from the Tabernacle. Every day for 40 years.

The whole thing – the Tabernacle and the Ark - was very beautiful but few people were able to go in and see the beauty, only the select priests. God remained largely hidden.

When the people finally entered the chosen land of Canaan, the Tabernacle and the Ark were taken to Shiloh in Joshua's tribal land to avoid dispute amongst the twelve tribes.

It remained there for about 300 years, during the time of the Judges of Israel. Then the Ark was captured in a battle and taken off by the Philistines. The Tabernacle itself remained at Shiloh.

David eventually found the Ark and brought it to Jerusalem, housing it in a tent until Solomon completed a lavish temple for it. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC the Ark disappeared. The Jews were taken captive to Babylon. Babylon eventually fell and the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple about 70 years later but the new temple never housed the Ark.

Since its disappearance, numerous theories have arisen about its fate. One of the most well known holds that Levitical priests moved the Ark to Egypt just before the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. From there it was supposedly moved to Ethiopia, where it resides to this day in the town of Aksum, in the St. Mary of Zion cathedral. Only one man, a monk known as "the Guardian," is allowed to see the

Ark, and church authorities have never allowed it to be studied to determine its authenticity.

Another account has Jeremiah taking both the Ark and the Tabernacle back to Mount Sinai where Moses received the ten commandments from God and sealing them in a cave.

And so some still seek these artefacts today – hence Raiders of the Lost Ark!

Why did God allow the Ark and Tabernacle to disappear? I think it had served its purpose and God was doing a new thing. The earthly Tabernacle was temporary. It says at Hebrews 8 : 13 that the old covenant was aging and obsolete because of the new thing God was doing.

The sacrifices in the old tabernacle could not free people from sin, they had to keep coming back again and again to sacrifice and atone. Forgiveness was not once and for all.

We read in Hebrews 9 (TPT) : **For as long as the Tabernacle stood it was an illustration that pointed to our present time of fulfilment, demonstrating that offerings and animal sacrifices had failed to perfectly cleanse the conscience of worshippers. For this old pattern of worship was a matter of external rules and rituals concerning food and drink and ceremonial washings which was imposed upon us until the appointed time of heart-restoration had arrived.**

Restoration, being restored into a rightful relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus becomes the new tabernacle, God dwelling in him, visible for all to see.

At Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit of God descended on him and filled him. I heard someone say recently that at this baptism, God came down and filled God. And Jesus then affects everyone he meets using what was inside him, God in him.

God walked amongst the people again as he had done in the garden in the beginning. In human form God healed and spoke and cared and blessed and loved and wept and laughed. He was no longer hidden from the ordinary man and woman but there to be seen and heard and touched by the marginalised and the needy and the sinful and the outcast.

Hebrews 9 : 11 – **Now the Anointed One has become the King-Priest of every wonderful thing that has come. For he serves in a greater, more perfect heavenly tabernacle not made by men. And he has entered once and forever into the**

**Holiest Sanctuary of All, not with the blood of animal sacrifices but the sacred blood of his own sacrifice. And he alone has made our salvation secure forever!**

When Jesus breathed his last and died on the cross, we are told that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Mark 15:38). The veil separating people from God was removed. God was no longer hidden from sight in the inner places of a man-made Tabernacle. People could look at Jesus and say “God loves me like that.”

A favourite hymn has these beautiful words -

JESUS is King

And I will extol Him,

2 We have a hope

That is steadfast and certain,

Gone through the curtain

And touching the throne;

There is one final aspect of the Tabernacle that brings the concept up to date. The Tabernacle shifts at Pentecost - into each one of us through the Holy Spirit. Just as the wind blew through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening, that same wind or breath of God blew through the house where the disciples were gathered in the early morning on that first Christian Pentecost.

And from that day the Spirit of God dwelt within men and women.

Can you see how God has come closer and closer to us, restoring the closeness and intimacy that he had with those he created in the beginning?

Moses heard his voice in a burning bush

He had to find him up a mountain.

The people saw him in pillars of fire and cloud

He dwelt out of sight in the holy of Holies within the Tabernacle.

He appeared to all people in Jesus Christ.....but Jesus Christ returned to the throne in heaven.

And then God made his dwelling in his people!

All religions have houses, temples, churches, shrines, holy spaces – but our one true God is unique, he has a dwelling place that is not a building.

We talk about this being God’s house but it isn’t really, not in the sense of coming here to meet with him on a Sunday morning. He is with us all the time and we bring his holy spirit here with us. He leaves with us. This is just a building.

**1 Corinthians 3 : 16 (NIV) – Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit lives in you?**

**1 Corinthians 6 : 19 (TPT) - Have you forgotten that your body is now the sacred temple of the Spirit of Holiness, who lives in you? You don’t belong to yourselves any longer, for the gift of God, the Holy Spirit, lives inside your sanctuary. You were God’s expensive purchase, paid for with tears of blood. So by all means then use your body to bring glory to God!**

And so we should affect the people we meet because of who dwells in us. We take Jesus’ Holy Spirit into every situation.

We also carry the Holy Spirit with us into worship and that should help us to worship God deeply and meaningfully with all our hearts and minds and souls.

The Tabernacle event was about bringing together 80 people who carry the Holy Spirit within them and giving them freedom to worship God as the Spirit moves them, to be creative, to be active, to be quiet, to dance, to wave banners, to make music and sing, to rest, to share, to pray, to minister to one another. There were children there, lots of young people and the young at heart in their eighties.

On the Saturday night it got quite exciting and wild with loud music and drumming and dancing and I commented that if anyone came into the building they would think that a rave was underway – and yet there was not a drop of alcohol in the room. It then occurred to us that it was rather like Pentecost itself. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and must have been euphoric and excited as they went out onto the street to speak about Jesus, each person hearing them declare the wonders of God in their own language. Some made fun of them and said that they must have had too much wine! And Peter stood up and said “Of course they’re not drunk as you suppose. It’s only 9 in the morning!”

I’m not sure if anyone would come into our church and accuse us of having a rave or even a party! We are traditionally restrained and what we do is very structured and planned which I think leaves little room for the Holy Spirit to break out and do

something new. Do we want to put God back in the box? To pull the curtain over so that we don't need to look too closely?

Or does God want us to lift the lid a little, remember that we have been set free. Remember that it is in him that **we move and live and have our being**. (Acts 17 : 28).

Not everyone will want to sometimes raise hands in worship or wave banners – but some will want to. Not everyone will want to move or dance in worship – but some will. Praising God by dancing is biblical, David did it when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. He was described leaping and dancing before the Lord and dancing with all his might, having thrown off his royal garments.

I'm signing up for Tabernacle next year and hoping that some from our church will go too.

We are going to sing a children's song later that completely summarises this morning's message –

Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart  
From the castle of my heart  
From the castle of my heart  
Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart  
When the King is in residence there  
So let it fly in the sky  
Let the whole world know  
Let the whole world know  
Let the whole world know  
So let it fly in the sky  
Let the whole world know  
THAT THE KING IS IN RESIDENCE THERE!

Amen