

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Thirteenth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – August 7, 2016 - Communion**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-10**

**For Reflection**

“Above the comforts of Base Camp, the expedition in fact became an almost Calvinistic undertaking. The ratio of misery to pleasure was greater by an order of magnitude than any mountain I'd been on; I quickly came to understand that climbing Everest was primarily about enduring pain. And in subjecting ourselves to week after week of toil, tedium and suffering, it struck me that most of us were probably seeking above all else, something like a state of grace.”

- Jon Krakauer, Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster

**Base Camp**

I've been searching for a metaphor. A metaphor for “church” that fits us – in this time and place – and undergirds our reason for being. And I think I found one. Actually it was given to me – to us – by Gary S. And that metaphor is “Base Camp.” It's been staring me in the face ever since Fred O. created the Teen Tent. It's a natural – biblically supported – fitting for this bunch of adventurers. It's such a relief – to find it – and begin to consciously shape our actions around it.

Friday was the one-year anniversary of my step-mom's death. My dad stood next to the grave marker – near the flowers brought by one of many adopted family members – and read the C.S. Lewis quotation on the stone, “The serious business of heaven in joy.” He remarked how he now realizes the deep significance of the image of our earthly lives lived here impermanently – in tents – and how much better it will be to live in G-d's tents which are much better made. I'm actually amazed by how much scripture my dad has in his head – but googling his reference I came up with 2 Corinthians 5:1:

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. - 2 Corinthians 5:1

And looking at chapters 4 and 5 I discovered many images relating to our mortality – our temporary separation from G-d and returning. There are references to being at home with G-d and then away – G-d's dwelling being essentially our Base Camp in a treacherous world.

Exodus is, of course, filled with tent imagery – G-d's people living 40 years in the wilderness – with impermanent dwellings. And in the center of their encampments

they erected a tabernacle – a tent that was G-d's dwelling place – always among them wherever they pitched their earthly tents.

And our text for today from the Christian Epistles – referencing the Hebrew Pentateuch – reminds us that:

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; **and he set out, not knowing where he was going.** 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, **living in tents**, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 **For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

- Hebrews 11:8-10

For so many centuries the Church – first formed in the open air and around the kitchen tables of people's humble homes – the Church as an establishment came to be an institution housed in castles and cathedrals. Like David and Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem we have repeatedly attempted to set up permanent housing for our Divine Companion – who continues to resist containment and lead us back out into the open air.

And in our time we find these earthly foundations crumbling, a new Church emerging from the rubble – in temporary locations – people's living rooms, public bars and coffee houses, parks and schools, tents on the lawn and rented galleries. Churches are more and more physically what G-d is spiritually – untethered from place – free to reside wherever people already are – shaping Beloved Communities of Spirit Bodies reinforced and re-supplied to meet the world in all its forms – beautiful and perilous.

If we look at the definitions of Base Camp we find similarities to our life here together – the things we hope to find during our brief hours as a weekly community:

A main encampment **providing supplies, shelter, and communications for persons engaged in wide-ranging activities**, as exploring, reconnaissance, hunting, or mountain climbing.

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/base-camp>

**The place whereby expeditions start and end. A place to call home away from home, and a place where noble troupes gather.**

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=basecamp>

**Where things begin...the starting point....**

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=basecamp>

**An encampment that serves as a staging area for a larger activity**, for example in mountaineering

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/base-camp>

This metaphor certainly applies to what we had in mind when we created new bylaws – bylaws that encourage any individual or small committee with an idea for a PROJECT that improves the world – to find support, resources and encouragement here. This is our staging area.

As we face the Everest of a national election and its aftermath – we can provide hope, ideas, strength – PSAs – and spiritual focus for the challenge of electing person focused on making this country and this world a better place for everyone, not just some.

As we face the Everests of gun violence, homelessness, poverty, racism, misogyny, climate change, you-name-it – this can be a place of reflection, reconciliation, broadening of our understanding, a source of funding for culture shift efforts, a creative stew (as Elizabeth put it) to feed our imaginations and bodies.

As we face the Everests of raising children, pursuing careers, the years of age-giftedness, grief, illness, loneliness, daily frustrations – this can be a place of rest, rejuvenation, commiseration, Village creation, advice sharing – and a constant reminder that G-d has our backs – as well as a very large tent where all are welcome and the banquet is prepared.

- We can be intentional about staying light on our feet, ready to move if need be, nested but not ensconced, rooted but potted. ☺
- Rather than finding one issue to focus on as a community – we can focus on BEING the change we wish to see in the world – EMBODYING the lightness and unfettered-ness of the Holy Spirit – being PRESENT where our gifts and passions and the needs of the world meet.
- This means letting go of the habits of a larger “program” oriented church. This means letting go of numerical growth as our standard for success. This means celebrating any effort to live out our core values – hoping to have a positive impact on or influence in this beautiful, perilous world.
- This means that whenever someone moves away to Oklahoma or New Orleans or Berkeley – our Beloved Community is not diminished but broadened. We will maintain base camp for our far-flung explorers who continue to conquer their chosen Everests around the world. And we will welcome fellow travelers however long or short our time on the same path.

And in the end – when the last of us goes forth and the supplies have been distributed appropriately – we will have honored our ancestors, given hope to future generations – and traded our battered tents for the heavenly tabernacle – where we can rest and be restored for the next adventure.

## Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-10

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible...

8 By faith **Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.** 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, **living in tents**, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 **For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

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## From 2 Corinthians 4-5

4:1 **Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.**

7 **But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.** 8 **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;**

16 **So we do not lose heart.** Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

5:1 **For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.** 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— 3 if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So we are always confident; **even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord**— 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.