

I. Intro.

Three weeks ago you heard me describe how my years spent as a youth in Bolivia were very formative in my eventual calling into pastoral ministry. My first year in Bolivia was 7th grade, which I spent at a fundamentalist-oriented boarding school for missionary kids. The school, nicknamed Tambo, was located in a rugged desert area in the central Bolivian mountains,



looking like this.

I remember well one day in the Physical Education class for 7th & 8th grade boys. Our assignment was to go out from the school campus on a 2 or 3-mile run. From the paved road, we turned off into dry creek beds and cattle paths, flanked by cactus big and small. Even back then I didn't enjoy running, so I didn't stay up with the larger pack of boys. I found myself jogging alone in the 85° heat. Nobody thought of water bottles in those days.

Pretty soon I heard no sign of my classmates, but I figured if I kept going I'd catch up with them. Suddenly up on the trail ahead of me, my way was blocked by a big black bull with sharp horns. He was watching me. I didn't fancy myself a matador, so I took off on another side trail to get around the bull. Soon there he was again in front of me on that trail.

Now I was starting to panic, and by that time I was disoriented. I was too confused to try retracing my steps, and the sun was starting to get low in the sky. I got away from the bull and just plodded on ... hot, tired and scared.

Somehow I stumbled back up to the one blacktop highway in that area, just as the old Tambo Power Wagon truck was passing by. The pickup was loaded with a posse of teachers and high school boys sent out to look for me. I collapsed in the back of the truck, safe at last from being lost in the desert.

Although I wasn't consciously thinking of such images at the time, I would have loved to crawl into a tent along the trail to take shelter in. In MY time of trouble, I just wanted to be gathered under the spread wings of Jesus, the mother hen! Thank God for that vintage Power Wagon!

II. Don't we all long for safe shelter at times?



A. Haven't you had times of feeling lost, forsaken or unsafe?

1. I'm sure many of you have your own stories to tell where you have felt, like the psalmist, that you were surrounded by a besieging army ... being threatened by enemies
2. You may have stories of physical dislocation and being literally in danger, with your life or health at risk.
3. Or there may be times when your body was not at risk but when people you didn't like and scary or unfamiliar surroundings made you feel vulnerable nonetheless.

B. The writer of Ps. 27 gives us contrasting images ...

1. First we have images of threatening enemies ... wicked people advancing ... menacing armies and war about to break out
2. Then we are given calming images with God at the center:
 - a) God's beautiful temple, the grand house of the Lord
 - b) A sacred tent to shelter us
 - c) A high rock of safety where God will place us ... where enemies can't reach us

C. This morning we also have Jesus himself, in the midst of a very peculiar scene with his disciples, giving us one of the most beautiful and enduring images in the Gospels

1. Jesus is traveling through Galilean towns and villages, slowly making his way toward Jerusalem as he's teaching and healing
 - a) First he tells some people that the door is narrow to salvation and not everyone will get into God's kingdom
 - b) Then he ignores a warning from the Pharisees for his own safety, and proceeds to insult King Herod while he insists he will continue on his healing mission heading to Jerusalem, as dangerous as that would be!
2. The way that Jerusalem has badly treated prophets before him is

his segue to lament the suffering that he knows will yet come upon the city ...

a) He speaks tenderly to the beloved city where Solomon had the grand Temple built, as a majestic and holy dwelling place for God Most High:

b) *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."*

c) What a beautiful and comforting word picture this is:



Jesus gathering and sheltering the people He loves, just like a hen hovering protectively with wings outspread over a brood of vulnerable chicks!

D. I believe the message from God today on this 2nd Sunday of Lent is simple: *My people I love you and I want to give you safe shelter!*

III. But finding safe shelter in God doesn't always mean it all turns out "happily ever after" ...

A. Sometimes there doesn't appear to be a happy ending, even for people in troubling times who do find some kind of shelter

1. Sometimes the sheltering tent is invisible ...
2. Sometimes it requires a lot of faith, amidst all our fears

B. I recently watched a movie that to me demonstrated finding that invisible tent

"Alone in Berlin" is a film based on a true story, which takes place in WW2 Germany.



Otto and Anna Quangel are a middle-aged working-class couple in Berlin whose only son is killed as a soldier on the front lines of Hitler's army.

Bitter at the fascist Nazi regime, Otto begins a campaign of resistance by carefully leaving postcards with anti-Nazi messages in public places in Berlin. This prompts a manhunt by Nazi officials to find and punish this secret traitor. Anna joins him on this very dangerous mission.

Through our Lenten lens of finding a safe shelter in troubled times, there is a very interesting scene in the movie when Allied planes are bombing Berlin and people are crammed into designated air raid shelters. Otto and Anna are urged by a soldier to get off the street into an air raid shelter, which would put them under the scrutiny of SS officers. They refuse, preferring exposure to Allied bombs rather than exposure to Nazi officials.

When they are finally caught, Otto is brought into a Nazi courtroom to stand trial. For the first time since their arrests, husband and wife see each other again in a brief reunion on a courtroom bench, discreetly holding hands. Otto whispers, "You know what will happen, don't you?" She nods her head and he says, "It can't be changed." With a grim smile, she says, "I know. It doesn't matter." At that, he knows that they remain united in their just resistance to Nazi evil, even unto death. They were both executed in prison in 1943.

The Nazi cruelty and totalitarian demands costs this couple their son and nearly costs them their marriage. Ironically, amid the horrors of Nazism, they find a shared sense of meaning and moral safe space in brazenly defying Hitler's insanity, under his very nose! In essence, they find an invisible tent, although the film does not specifically attribute this to religious beliefs.

C. The story of God's people in the Bible and the rest of Christian history up to this day is full of martyrs who found their invisible tent under the shadow of God's wings



1. Of those martyrs, in New Testament times, there was Stephen,

the apostle Paul and most of Jesus' original disciples who committed their spirits to God when they were put to death for the sake of Jesus their Lord

2. In the 16th Century, hundreds of our Anabaptist forbears cried out to God for safe deliverance, even as they died for their adherence to a biblical faith based on believers baptism and the separation of church and state, with Jesus alone as Lord.

3. About 5 years ago, a Christianity Today article reported research that about 70 million Christians have been martyred since Jesus walked the earth! <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/70-million-christians-martyred-faith-since-jesus-walked-earth/38403.htm>

IV. Conclusion

A. Briefly during the opening tone chimes, you saw on the screen our theme for today's worship

B. Indeed, we are called to come find safe shelter with God, recognizing that the shelter provided will sometimes be quite literal, and other times is a spiritual reality for our minds and hearts

C. I will leave you with some words to take away today, adapted from that opening theme. I invite you to join me in these words responsively now:

1. **All: When dark fear overwhelms us,**
2. *Leader: God gathers us together in safe shelter, whether literal or figurative ... physical or spiritual.*
3. **All: Let us seek the light of God's face!**