**[1]** Third Sunday After Epiphany (Jan 26, 2025)
Sermon Title: A Tent for the Sun
Scripture: Psalm 19
Theme: Surveying Creation/Environmental Theology

“In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a champion (*gibbor*)runs its course (*orach*)with joy—the day-breaking sun, an athlete racing to the tape. That is how God’s [Voice/Word] vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset, melting ice, scorching deserts, warming hearts to faith.”

**[2]** In today’s scripture from the Psalms, the poet writes: “the heavens tell of the glory of God.” Job 9:9 asks the rhetorical question: “Who stretched out the heavens … beyond understanding? Who makes the Great Bear (Arcturus), Orion, and Pleiades [in the sky], and the constellations of the south?” In ancient times, the Chaldeans CALLED these constellations, **the chambers of the south**; Chaldeans were the people living near the city of Ur, from whom Abraham and Sarah left on their journey to a new home. They thought of these as secret or hidden chambers, that hid celestial lights at certain times of the year, rendering their light invisible. They knew little about the continent of Antarctica at the time, but thought of it as a place at the end of the heavens where the light went to sleep. The Chaldeans imagined these chambers as majestic beyond imagination; they were luxuriant “**mansions** for the sun and moon and stars.” In Job’s thinking, these invisible chambers of the sky stretch far beyond what anyone can see, beyond the southern horizon, and then on and on. God, being the author of the heavens, the creator of the greater light and the lesser light, and the stars behind them, also is the author of these chambers and mansions that sometimes hide his creation. Job has a larger understanding of the heavens because of his faith in a God who creates out of nothing and calls each star by name, directing its orbit and influence on the earth.

 In a recent experience of the total solar eclipse on August 21, 2017 here in the **[3]** United States, many described the shadows of heavenly bodies on the earth as
“otherworldly,” yet “personal,” as an intersection of mystery and knowledge, as
the “universe being present with us in one moment of time,” broadcasting a
“diamond-effect” as the universe breaks in upon us and sits down beside us. These
were actual first-person descriptions of what people experienced on that day. It is
God who sits above the circle of the earth and stretches out the heavens like a curtain of light (Is. 40:22), bending the rays of the sun to form an archway that covers the sky like a cloak (Psalm 104:2). In looking at pictures from the
international space station, the view of the sunrise or sunset is even grander,
showing the arc of light extending almost a third of the circumference of the earth.

 But, I would like to point out that ours is a different language from the ancient
Chaldeans. Instead of thinking of the secret chambers of the south as mansions,
our Jewish-Christian tradition thinks of them as “tents.” Psalm 89:37 declares that
the heavens are spread out like a tent in which we can dwell. And so, the psalmist
writes in today’s psalm 19 that God has established a tabernacle, a tent, in the
heavens for the sun. This is a strange poetry to us and hard for us to imagine or
visualize. How would we describe a “tent for the sun?” What is about this tent
that is a witness to God’s authority and elicits the praise of those who have eyes to
see? The sun comes out of its tent each morning, from beyond the end of the
heavens, and courses above us to the other end of the heavens, and then disappears
into its tent yet again. The Apostle Paul describes the human heart as the tent, the
temple, of the Living God (2 Cor. 6:16), and so if we think of this tent of the sun,
as a reflection of God’s heart, perhaps we have a clue to work on in our
imagination. “I will live with them and walk among them and I will be their God
and they will be My people.” The heavens declare the glory of God each day and
each night, the silent words of their movement refresh us each morning, and the
silent words of their memory renew our hope during the night.

You may remember that during the Feast of Tabernacles, the worshipper was asked
to pitch a tent in the outdoors and to live for a night under the stars to remember
one’s total dependency upon God, without a roof over one’s head to block our
vision of God. This feast was an intentional experience of poverty, an experience of darkness that would help each worshipper to appreciate the approaching light
even more. Without any blockade of our own making and with the grace that
overcomes the sin of this world, the DaySpring of God can launch into our hearts,
like the bridegroom leaping from his bed to greet the world, or an athlete racing to the finish line to win the race, or score a touchdown, or like God’s Word, melting
ice and warming hearts to faith.

 The sun, moon and stars are enduring witnesses to God’s faithfulness and
authority. These witnesses in the heavens are called to “praise God” in their daily
courses and dynamic movements. The prophet Amos borrows the language of Job: “Who makes Pleiades and Orion, and turns the shadow of death to the morning?”
(Amos 5:6; 8-9). The same creator God who made everything in the heavens, also
turns shadows of death into light-rays of life, light-rays that brighten the heart and
make the eyes glow, literally setting eyes on fire with love. And this experience of
new life at the horizon, speaks to us of how Death and Sin can NO LONGER have
**[4]** dominion over those of us who know the Lord. (Romans 6:14) And speaking of new life at the horizon, isn’t it interesting that, as the New Horizons Spacecraft flew past Pluto in 2015, we saw an icy and colorful, heart-shaped image on its face, as if to say, ‘goodbye, come again, we love you!”

So, what if, what if, we could say that we see the fire in each other’s eyes after worship here at Western Oaks Christian Church? What if we could see the fire in our own eyes echoed through the fire in another’s eyes.

**[5]** I was reading through a book called *the John Wayne Code* that I found on my vacation through Madison County, Iowa, a few years ago. In 1930, John Wayne made a movie called the “Big Trail,” and is quoted in the movie with these words: “When you stop fighting, that’s death.” We must look for the fire in each other’s eyes and nourish it as much as possible. We can easily visualize an earthly tent, but it is hard to imagine a heavenly tent, unless we possibly think of our heart-tents as a copy or a shadow of the heavenly tent of testimony, echoing the praise of God in our world. (Heb. 8:1-5; Acts 7:44). The heavens reflect the glory of God in our hearts.

Sometimes, on occasion, I think it is helpful to hear a paraphrase of scripture,
especially when it translates poetry. Here is the paraphrase from Psalm 19 by
Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

“The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together. The signposts of God are clear and point out the right road. The life-maps of God are right, showing the way to joy. The directions of God are plain and easy on the eyes. God’s reputation is twenty-four-carat gold, with a lifetime guarantee. The decisions of God are accurate down to the n-th degree. God’s Word is better than a diamond, better than a diamond set between emeralds. You’ll like it better than strawberries in spring, better than red, ripe strawberries.”

The original language goes something like this: The Torah (Law) of the Lord is
reviving and restoring, delivering again the breath of life, and witnessing that the
Lord is true, building up the soul, teaching wisdom to those who can hear. The
mission and commandment of the Lord is direct and just, cheering up the heart,
bright and pure, and enlightening, en-firing the eyes.

Note how the Gospel of Matthew pulls from this language about “glory of God in
the tent of the sun.”

“In the end of days, the Lord God will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, gathering his own from the four winds of the earth, from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven.” (Matt. 24:31).

The Gospel Story calls out to us to form the Beloved Community in those who
hear the Word silently, yet loudly, witnessing in the heavens.

**[6]** In his publication of hymn texts entitled “A Greener Place to Grow,” Adam Tice includes a hymn entitled: Come, living Christ, and be our Word, the story that we sing, that everywhere our voice is heard, your Spirit’s song will ring, as voices join the joyful sound, each with a part to raise, we move as one, together bound, Christ’s body, born in praise. Come, living church, be born again, as body word and sign. Bring healing to a world of pain, restoring God’s design, reflect what earth is meant to be, creation reconciled, and live your new identity as God’s beloved child. (Lyricist: Adam Tice).

**[7]** Psalm 19 uses the metaphor of a bridegroom leaving his wedding canopy, and,
like a champion, running his course with joy. This is the day-breaking sun,
like an athlete racing to the finish line, with joy. Some background to this metaphor is given in Matthew, chapter 25: “The cultural practice in the time of Jesus is that the bridegroom would travel to the bride’s family’s house where the bride had been celebrating and bring the bride back to the bridegroom’s family’s house to continue the wedding celebration with the bridegroom’s family. The role of the bridal attendants is to wait as long as it takes for everyone to arrive at the
meeting place, with their torches and lamps properly “trimmed” for the occasion, where the torches and lamps will light the way, but also be “festive” and properly decorated for the occasion of a wedding (*kosméō*)*.* This is the context for the words we often hear from the bible: “Be ready, for you know not the hour or the day of the Lord’s Coming!” If we are ready, we will see with expectation and patience, with apocalyptic eyes, to see as one who co-creates with God in the moment.
Theologically, we speak of this as “dominion.” As co-creators with God, we have been given dominion over the earth, to do what is necessary to take care of our planet, indeed all of creation. We are called to mindfulness and gratitude, to tend to the repair of the world (*tikkun olam*), and to the health of our communities, to bring Shalom to ourselves, our friends and neighbors, both far away and near, and to the creation itself, proactively and proleptically. The desire of the Creator is that we should cooperate with the forces of goodness and life wherever they are found. Our prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, call us to protect our planet and take responsibility for the dominion we have been given over creation, and for its healing.  Truly we cannot surrender the future of our planet to the forces of fatalism.  The whole of creation bears the breath of God in all its many facets just as we too bear the breath of God.  The whole creation is in the groans of childbirth waiting to be born, as too are we. Alleluia. Amen.