

He Tabernacled Among Us

John 1:10-14

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In the television show “Undercover Boss,” a CEO of a very successful and sometimes well-known company leaves the corporate office and enters the workforce at one of the lowest levels of the business.

The boss sometimes puts on a disguise and poses as a new trainee and spends several days undercover learning various parts of the job.

This gives the boss an opportunity to meet some of the employees and discover firsthand what it is like working for his or her company.

The boss asks lots of questions and by the end of the experience discovers things about the company he or she could never have discovered by staying in the office.

Perhaps more importantly, people in the company learn something about the boss they would have never known had the boss stayed in the comfort of the CEO’s office.

At the end of the show, the CEO’s identity is revealed.

Of course, the people who trained the CEO are shocked, surprised, and then humbled to find out who they have been working with. The CEO rewards those who are making the company great but sometimes slackers are reprimanded.

There was a time they thought of the boss as someone that was unapproachable, perhaps someone who was too removed from their daily lives to know or care for them or about their jobs. They may have respected the boss, thought highly of the boss, and been grateful for their jobs, but could not feel close to the boss because there was no personal connection.

One day as I read John 1:14, the thought occurred to me, “Jesus was the original Undercover Boss.”

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Let me give you some background.

Thousands of years before the first Christmas, the Hebrew people identified the presence of God with the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was their church. The people were nomadic. So every time they moved to a different place, they would put up and take down the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was a huge tent made from goat skin. It housed all the holy objects that connected the people with God: The Ark of the Covenant where the Ten Commandments were kept, a table for the Bread of the Presence, a seven-branched lamp, the altar for burning incense, a place called the Holy Place, and a place called the Holy of Holies, where the priest entered only once a year to secure forgiveness of the people's sins, were all in the tabernacle.

Each time the tabernacle went up in a new place, it was a visible symbol that God was in their midst. God was with them. They knew it. They could see the tent.

There, in that tent, they knew that the presence of God resided. Though it must have brought comfort to know that God was there in their midst, the tabernacle had its limits.

God was impersonal. Like many CEO's, God seemed unapproachable. In fact, God was unapproachable. Only the priest had access to God. Not even the priest could be personal with God.

The priest would go into the most holy place in the tabernacle with great fear. He did that only one time a year. The presence of God was so feared by the people that when the priest went into the Holy of Holies, they tied a rope to his leg so that if he died while in the presence of God, they could pull him out because no one would dare go in to there to get him. They feared the presence of God that much.

God dwelt or He tabernacled among the people and yet there was distance between them, symbolized by the veil that separated the priest from the entrance to the Holy of Holies.

Remember that – a veil separated the priest from the entrance into the Holy of Holies. It kept the people separated from God as well.

As the history of God and his people developed, the distance between God and people began to lessen.

People began to hear God speak to them personally more often. Some began to write about their experiences with God. Some of these inspired writings were handed down and later became affirmed as holy scripture.

Moses heard God speak through a burning bush that was not consumed. He later wrote down many of the laws of God. The most famous are the Ten Commandments to which we have already mentioned.

Young Samuel heard God speak to him while he lay down to sleep and he finally responded, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." 1 Samuel 3:10

Isaiah heard God saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Isaiah said, "Here am I. Send me." Isaiah 6:9

Still, these were the exceptions and not the rule.

Many wanted to know God, but most were afraid to approach God. God was feared more than loved.

The times they drew near to God the most was when they were in trouble with their enemies. Then they cried out to God to save them.

The writings of the prophets begin to give hints that God was up to something, that God was going to reveal himself through a Messiah, a promised leader.

As they anticipated a leader to come, they were a bit like a little girl that was being put to bed by her mother during a thunderstorm. Several times the mother tried to leave the room, but the little girl was afraid and insisted that her mother stay with her until the storm was over.

The mother, who had other things to accomplish, said to her daughter, "God will take care of you. You don't have to be afraid." The little girl cried out. "I know, Mommy, but when it thunders like this, a little girl wants somebody with skin on."

The Hebrew people were looking for God to send them a Messiah, a leader they could see and trust. They never thought God would come to them himself.

But that's what God did. God came with skin on. God put on a face. God stepped out of heaven into our world. God came to be with us in Jesus, the Christ, the promised Messiah.

People expected a ruler like King David to come as the Messiah. God came himself as the Messiah, as Jesus, the suffering servant. He was the original undercover boss.

In telling his version of the most incredible event in the history of the world, John the Evangelist makes no reference to the virgin birth, no reference to wise men or shepherds, and no reference to a manger in Bethlehem.

Others had told that story. John wanted his readers to know that Jesus was not an afterthought of God in response to the people's desire to know God in a more personable way.

John wanted his readers to know that Jesus and God were the same. From the creation, they were one. Jesus was God. Jesus was God with skin on.

The way John chose to tell this is found in verse 14. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

The Greek word for dwelling is "tabernacle." Because we do not read the original languages, we miss this beautiful word.

The people of the first century would not have missed this Greek word or its symbolism. It connected them with their roots. It connected them with the days when the tent of the tabernacle represented the presence of God.

John wrote: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."

Through Jesus, God decided to pitch his tent here, among us, so we could understand the grace, mercy, love, and kindness of God. This is another reason Jesus is called "Emmanuel." Through Jesus, God is with us.

Through Jesus, God walked the same roads we walk, and he experienced the same emotions we experience.

The writer of Hebrews expressed it like this: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16 NIV)

He also came to reprimand those who deal unjustly with others, and to show us a pathway to God through repentance rather than religion, through self-denial, and through humility.

As the original undercover boss, Jesus wasn't recognized by many because he first pitched his tent in a cattle stall.

Jesus pitched his tent among common people, Mary and Joseph, people with no status, but with a desire to follow and know God.

He was born to a virgin so he was fully God and fully man.

Jesus pitched his tent among an insignificant town called Nazareth.

Jesus pitched his tent among the poor, but also befriended the rich, among the learned and the unlearned, the religious and the non-religious.

Centuries earlier, when the tabernacle was being erected, people stood and watched and were filled with a feeling of the presence of God.

That experience was felt by the people of Jesus' day when they met him.

It was felt by the shepherds and the wise men who visited him in a manger.

It was felt by his family when they took him to the temple to dedicate him when he was 8 days old and met Simeon and Anna who blessed them with their prophecies.

It was felt by the scholars of his day when at age 12 he amazed them in the temple with his sharp questions and keen insight.

It was felt by his family, disciples and those in attendance at a wedding in Cana when he performed his first miracle.

It was felt by the lepers he healed, the women he taught and liberated, the children he included and loved, the tax collectors he befriended, by those who witnessed his miracles, and the Gentiles he reached out to and included in his ministry.

It was felt by the Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross as Jesus died. He said, "Surely, this man was the son of God."

It was felt by the thief who died beside him and asked Jesus to remember him when he entered his kingdom.

It was felt by Thomas when he placed his finger in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God."

But the greater question is this: Has it been felt by you? Has the unmistakable presence of God reached out and changed your life? Have you allowed God to pitch his tent in your life through the spirit of Jesus?

Jesus left his spirit with us when he breathed his Holy Spirit on those who believed his death took away their sins.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, the Bible says that at the very moment Jesus gave up his spirit, the veil in the temple that separated the people from the Holy of Holies was ripped from top to bottom.

Jesus is the High Priest whose death on the cross is the sacrifice that God accepts as debt for our sin. We now can go directly to God, the same God who spoke and created the universe, to ask for forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus gave his life for us to have this privilege. Jesus is our high priest. Jesus is our intercessor. Jesus is the undercover boss who goes to the Father on our behalf and says to the Father, "This person has lived a life that isn't deserving of heaven, but I've taken care of the cost."

Now, Jesus wants to tabernacle in your life. Jesus wants to dwell in you so that wherever you go, God will always be with you. Once your sins are forgiven and you ask the Lord Jesus into your life, Jesus breathes his Spirit into your heart. That's how you establish a personal relationship with God.

This is the reason Jesus taught us to pray to God and address God as "Abba," or Father, not because God is male, but because God is a Spirit, that you can know personally.

Now only does God know personally, but God knew you before you were conceived in your mother's womb.

God wants to tabernacle in your life. God wants to journey with you wherever you go. God wants you to have the unmistakable assurance of His presence, because that is what gives us hope.

God is not tucked away in heaven. God is among us. God wants to be with you.

This morning, if you are not sure whether God is with you or not, you should pray a simple prayer like this:

Heavenly Father,

I confess that I have sin in my life. I want you to be with me all the time. I want to live a life for you and serve you. Give me the gift of your Spirit. I want to follow Jesus and invite him into my life.

Amen.

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