

6th September 2021

Tents

**“This is what the LORD says:
are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?”**

Bible, 2 Samuel 7:5

Last month I attended an *Edinburgh International Festival* concert – in a tent! Because of Covid restrictions, alternative venues to concert halls and theatres had to be found. The solution? Erect a tent! So, in a school playing field, in a tent big enough for several Jumbo Jets, with the wind gently blowing dandelion spores through the open sides, and with the audience well wrapped up against the late-evening drop in temperature, we enjoyed some wonderful Russian orchestral music. Amazing!

In the early 1970s, when tenting was permitted in the field below Iona Abbey, I worked one summer with the transient “tented community”. When it was my birthday in August, some of the tenters baked me a cake. They’d constructed an earth-oven heated by a wood fire. And, from an old biscuit tin, and in a tent, we shared the best birthday cake I’ve ever had.

There are no longer tents in the field below Iona Abbey. When the Edinburgh Festival was over, the tents were taken down. Tents, audiences, orchestras, earth-ovens, tenters move on. But the pleasures of shared experiences, and the memories of special occasions, will never fade.

In Second Samuel, king David has a debate with Nathan the prophet. Now the kingdom is settled, the king asks why God doesn’t have a “house of cedar” when he, the king, has a fine palace. On their travels, the home for their Ark of the Covenant had been a tent, pitched where they settled. It’s time, says David, for God to have a proper home. But God has said: “Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?” Don’t get too settled. The tent is a symbol of movement, adaptability, readiness, travelling light.

Yet what do *we* do with our God? We build fine houses for him when he might possibly be suggesting it’s better to keep using a tent.

When the tent is taken down, we move on. But when travelling starts again, the adventure of faith continues. Let’s not be constrained by houses of cedar. The memories and experiences we create in our tents, fine music and birthday cakes, worship and building community, will forever remain.

A prayer for today

Can I be one of your tent people, Lord? Only if you keep unsettling me. Amen