

NO MORE PORT-A-POTTY SUKKAH!

Today was one of the most amazing days I've had since I've been here. It was the first day of Sukkot and we had an incredible time celebrating it as a group. Last year, we had to share the sukkah the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) provided with the rabbi that's here. That didn't work out so well at all. The sukkah was literally a pop-up Port-A-Potty tent big enough for one person to stand up in and maybe two people to slow dance in. And I can promise you there is **no** slow dancing around here unless you want to get beat up. This year? Our group is the largest it's ever been in the history of this camp and the prison was forced to buy us our own sukkah. So the chaplain, who is a great guy, did some homework and found a portable sukkah that fit his budget and gave us extra room. It's a 6x8 metal frame that has a really nice blue/tan canvas that wraps around it. It has a window on one end with a zipper door on the other that opens like a curtain when unzipped. The ceiling is open and it has a bamboo top that can be rolled open or shut. It is really nice and has a **LOT** more room than the Port-A-Potty sukkah!



So today I spend some time carrying chairs over and lining the inside and then I found an old, beat-up coffee table in the work shed that made a perfect table to hold our food. I hung up my Hebrew calendar so the guys could see the Torah Portions that are read each day and I lined the table with a towel. The stage was set and ready to go for the beginning of our feast.

After 4 PM count, the kitchen put our meals on a Styrofoam plate, and we grabbed some snacks and soda and headed to the sukkah. I made some fresh salsa and brought some root beer and the feast was on. We all crammed into the sukkah, and I took a minute to explain to everyone the significance of what we were about to do. Then we bowed our heads, and I prayed us into the feast. We feasted on our hot dogs and onion rings - compliments of the BOP - and soaked up the moment.

OB, who has been devouring every book I have, was ready for me to teach them something and didn't let five minutes go by before he made me open the Word. So I explained to them why Sukkot is a seven-day feast but the high Sabbaths are actually on the first and eighth days. I took them back to Genesis one and showed them how the six days of creation are connected to the six thousand years of human history and the seventh day is connected to the Millennial reign of Messiah. That's symbolic of the feast. But the last great day is the eighth day which is connected to the time *after* the millennium where there will be a new heaven and a new earth...the time of great celebration. I explained to them what was really "**created**" on the first day in Genesis and how it related to John 1:1 and 14. They soaked up everything and were excited to take part in this ancient feast.

The fellowship was amazing and we all laughed and had a great time. There was one hilarious moment where Mr. T was getting kind of hot so I said we should just cut the plastic out of the window that was by him so the air could come through. He responded, "**Preacher, we can't do that 'cause then how would you keep the rain out?**" We all looked at each other and then looked up and busted up laughing since there's no top on the sukkah and if it rained there isn't even a roof! He realized what he was saying and his entire face turned red. It was funny.

What a blessing it was to spend time with these guys and to truly enjoy one another in the presence of our King. At one point I got a bit emotional because I realized that at the same time we were praying in our sukkah, my family was doing the same thing at their Sukkot. So although we may be miles apart, the Spirit of the Feast has brought us together and connected us in a beautiful way, even though we cannot physically be together at this time.

I have celebrated Sukkot with 200 people from my congregation and I'm now celebrating it with a just a handful. So for all you handfuls out there that are celebrating Sukkot with just your family or a few close friends, I salute you from Marion Camp and say "**Chag Sameach**" from Preacher and friends!

I used to say "**Go big or go home!**" Now I say, "**I just want to go home!**" :)

Love ya'll!!!!!!
Jim Staley
10 October 2017