

“Dedicating the Temple”

Exodus 35.21 – 36.1; 1 Kings 8.1-30; 1 Corinthians 3.10-16

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Today we celebrate a major accomplishment in the history of this congregation – the completion (almost!) of a major renovation effort designed to improve the comfort, safety, and accessibility of this historic stone church. There have only been two other moments like this in the history of this congregation; the first, in 1901, when local farmers hauled in a massive amount of stone from their fields to construct this building; the second, in 1960, when the large education wing was added onto the rear of the building. Some of you were here for the 1960 expansion. None of us were here for the 1901 construction, though some of you heard stories about it long ago from the people who were here then. All three times, we dreamed big and dug deep. In 1960, there were those who thought the project too expensive and not necessary. Sue Riley remembers that debate – and we all know how much that wing still gets used today. In 1901, there were those who thought we should build our church out of red brick. That would have been less expensive, and it would have resulted in a much plainer building, not the second-most-recognizable landmark in the city of Mason. This time around, our wish list was long, and as projected costs began to mount we had to make some difficult decisions, like placing the elevator inside the building rather than in a planned addition. There came a point where we even began to question, “Can we really afford an elevator?” But with careful budgeting, generous contributions, and an extremely successful capital campaign effort that raised more than three times our annual operating budget, we were able, by the grace of God, to accomplish more than we anticipated. The carpet here in the Sanctuary and the Memorial Room, for example, was a late addition to the project, as we realized we had enough money left in the project budget to cover the cost of new carpet and flooring. This truly is a remarkable accomplishment, thanks to the dedication and commitment of many people in this room, and many others not with us in body today but with us in spirit, including a few stalwart saints who made pledges and were generously supporting this project but who, alas, did not live long enough to see it through to its completion.

One person who wanted to be here today but couldn't is the Rev. Dr. David Beck, who was pastor of this congregation from 1991 to 1998. A number of you remember him. I received a very nice letter from him about a week ago. He writes: “I do appreciate receiving an invitation to the celebration of the renovation of Mason's most historic church building.” He sends his regrets. His wife Betty suffered a stroke in January 2013, and while she is still able to enjoy reading and swimming at a special pool with other stroke victims twice a week, she needs a significant amount of help with routine daily

tasks. A trip from Boise, Idaho, was just not possible. “The good news,” he writes, “is that we are able to attend churches..., restaurants, and other things whenever we desire. I am going to celebrate at the next presbytery meeting my fiftieth anniversary as an ordained minister.” He concludes: “We wish you and the congregation all good wishes on this happy occasion. Again we regret we cannot come. Sincerely, David L. Beck.” So to David, and Betty, and all the rest of our congregation’s extended friends and family who are celebrating with us from a distance, and also to Ken and June and Jeanne and Joyce and Rollin and Rockey and Lange and Jerry and Forest and Alison, who were all with us when we began this project but who now live in eternal glory, on behalf of all of us, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for your support, thank you for your encouragement, thank you for your faith. We love you, and we miss you, and we wish you could have been able to celebrate with us on this special day.

There were three times in the history of ancient Israel when the people of God worked together to build a house of worship for the Lord God Almighty. The first was under the leadership of Moses, following the exodus from Egypt, in the wilderness, in about the 13th century BC, when they constructed a portable sanctuary, called a “tabernacle” or a “meeting tent,” made primarily of wood and fabric. The second was during the reign of King Solomon, in the days of the united monarchy, in about the year 965 BC, when they constructed a magnificent temple made of cedar and juniper wood and inlaid with gold and bronze, built on a stone foundation, in the city of Jerusalem. The third was under the governorship of Zerubbabel, with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, following the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians, in about the year 515 BC, when they cleared away the rubble from the remains of the first temple and used stone and wood to construct a new temple on the same site. Five hundred years later that second temple was expanded by Herod the Great, and Jesus of Nazareth walked and worshiped and taught in it. The people of God have a long history of erecting sacred structures for the worship of God Almighty. What we do today stands in that great tradition.

As I was reflecting on our accomplishment and what we are celebrating today, I found myself comparing our efforts to those previous building projects recorded in the pages of our sacred scriptures, particularly the first two. If you recall your Old Testament history, you know that after the Israelites left Egypt, Moses brought them to Mount Sinai, where God gave to them the two tablets of stone on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. But Moses received a lot more than just that from God at the top of Mount Sinai. He received a whole corpus of laws and instructions. Some of those instructions told him how to build that tabernacle in the wilderness. Five whole chapters in the book of Exodus are devoted to the details of that tabernacle – how to build it, what to build it with, how to furnish it. Basically, it’s five chapters worth of *blueprints*, articulate to the minutest detail. When we began conceiving our renovation efforts here in Mason, we didn’t have blueprints handed to us from on high. God in his infinite wisdom did not just furnish us with a detailed plan for what we should do with this building and how we should do it. Instead, God furnished us with ... an architect. A professional, knowledgeable, skilled, and savvy architect who took our hopes and our dreams (and our budget!) and carefully, lovingly, turned them into blueprints – page after page of blueprints, some of which went through multiple revisions as we tweaked this and changed that. Our architect, Jackie Hoist, of H2A Architects (and – dare I say it – a U of M grad) is with us today. Several members of Jackie’s team made numerous trips to meet with us, measure things, study acoustics, and so forth, including designer Rob

Hollenback and engineers Cheryl Early, Robin Hyman, and Jacob Sabins. They are here today as well.

Blueprints are a starting place, but of course blueprints alone won't get the job done. That portable sanctuary in the wilderness wasn't going to be built on the divinely-given blueprints alone. Someone had to be in charge of overseeing the project, of seeing it through from beginning to end. God gave Moses a man named Bezalel, full of "the divine spirit, with skill, ability, and knowledge for every kind of work" (Exodus 31.3), to create designs, do metalwork, and cut stones; and a man named Oholiab, who had the skill to make everything: "the meeting tent, the ark containing the covenant, the cover that is on top of it, all the tent's furnishings," and so forth (Exodus 31.7). Together, Bezalel and Oholiab supervised the construction of the sanctuary and everything in it. God didn't give us Bezalel and Oholiab; he gave us Wieland, our construction management team: Matt Getchell (Principal in Charge), Dave Todd (Project Manager), Tom Smith (Project Superintendent), Matt Thibodeaux (student intern), and Denny Anderson (semi-retired, though you wouldn't have known it from the many times he was here on site supervising things). These guys basically devoted a year of their lives to our construction project. Tom practically *lived* here, and Dave and Matt and Denny came close. They not only *worked* for us, they also added a richness to our daily life here – a warmth, a love, an appreciation for this stone building and for what we do here, that was welcomed by all of us who were working closely with them.

I saw Tom hard at work with a hammer or a drill in his hand on many occasions, but technically the guys from Wieland were just overseeing the work that others were doing. Bezalel and Oholiab didn't construct that tabernacle all on their own; they directed other people. For our project, the heavy lifting was done by 17 subcontractors and their firms: Capital Steel & Builders Supply, Central Interconnect, Clark Foundation, Clark Trombley, Complete Enclosures, Great Lakes Elevator, Lansing Glass Company, Lansing Tile & Mosaics, Lansing Tile Interiors, Metal Frames, Michigan Demolition, MJ Contracting, Morrow Roofing, JT&T Electrical, Payne Rosso Company, Progressive, and T. H. Hart. To all of you, from all of us, *thank you* for the wonderful work you did here. We are deeply grateful.

But even if you have blueprints, even if you construction managers and construction workers, buildings like this don't just *appear*. You need *materials*. You need to *pay* for it all somehow. Thirty-three centuries ago, Moses invited the people of God to offer contributions. "Whoever freely wants to give should bring the Lord's gift offerings: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and deep red yarns; fine linen; goats' hair; rams' skin dyed red; beaded leather; acacia wood," along with oil, spices, and gemstones. (Exodus 35.5-9) That worked well for their needs back then, but we didn't really need yarn or goats' hair or rams' skins. We needed *cash*. Lots and lots of cash. And we needed someone who could help us *get* cash. Enter Russ Graunke, of Church Campaign Services, who orchestrated the largest capital campaign this congregation has ever seen. We need to give Peter Robinson credit for finding Russ; Peter was the head of our Capital Campaign Team, which also consisted of Jenny Bond, Shirley Day, Bonnie Friend, Joan Meinke, Sheren Wright, and myself. Russ worked with this team to develop a plan for how we were going to raise funds for this project, and then he trained about thirty of our members and sent them out in pairs – kind of like Jesus sending the disciples out in pairs to do ministry in his name. These pairs went out with promotional materials that had been prepared by NevinGraphics.... Then the pledges started coming in, and Sheren has kept us posted, week after week, as the contributions have grown. When we officially ended the pledge campaign, we were just shy of

\$900,000. Additional pledges and other unexpected contributions have continued to come in, bringing us closer and closer to the million-dollar mark. That's not enough to cover the whole cost of the project – that's why we've secured a loan. Peter found for us Jim Rissler of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, who has been immensely helpful, and just recently was able to secure for us a reduced interest rate on a portion of our loan. Our financial efforts were encouraged and blessed by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan, especially its Budget and Finance Committee. We especially need to thank Tedd Oyler, an elder from the Holland church, who helped us navigate the process of securing the loan; Leslie Keusch, office administrator, who helped us with the paperwork; and the Rev. John Best, General Presbyterian, who oversaw it all.

There were all the helping hands from within the congregation. Dozens of people helped us clean, paint, move, and organize, ranging in age from young Luke and Violet Mackey all the way up to Ernie Lutz, one of our oldest members. Others helped with landscaping, including the Boy Scout Troop that our church supports. We asked our Liturgical Art team to make color choices and to decorate various areas in the church as construction work was finishing. Our Treasurer, Vern Schrock, and Assistant Treasurer, Jim Day, signed a number of *very* large checks, and I want to express my gratitude to God that neither of them had heart failure when they were signing checks with six digits before the decimal point. Our Clerk of Session, Bruce Archer, signed a multitude of legal documents and change orders. Our Kitchen Angels prepared meals for our construction workers on a couple different occasions. And last, but certainly not least, is the team of people from our congregation who saw this project through from beginning to end, our Renovation Task Force. We started with just five people – Bob Filka (whom we talked into serving as chair), Barry Chapman, Bonnie Friend, Peter Robinson, and myself – and then when things got moving we brought in Greg Lang to help on the worship end of things, Sheren Wright to handle logistics with ongoing church operations, and Lori Filka to keep us abreast of the needs of the educational ministry of the church. These eight people met for lengthy discussions, first among ourselves, then with H2A, and then with Wieland, month after month, sometimes twice a month, for the better part of two or three years, and we owe them an *immense* debt of gratitude. We've talked at Session about whether we're ready to dismiss this Task Force with thanks and we've concluded "not yet" – we want to make sure that the few remaining loose ends get tied up before we do that! So, if you're a member or a friend of this congregation who helped in *any way* towards the completion of these renovation efforts, I'd like to ask you to stand so we can thank you.

So, with all the hard work and all these words of gratitude behind us, we're almost ready to dedicate this sanctuary to the ongoing worship and service of Almighty God. Solomon did that, and did that well, when the first temple was built in Jerusalem. "Lord God of Israel," he said, "there's no god like you in heaven above or in earth below! You keep the covenant and show loyalty to your servants who walk before you with all their heart." (1 Kings 8.23) Solomon knew the greatness of God, the majesty of God; he had heard God talking to him in his heart, and he desired to be faithful to God in constructing that temple and establishing it as a permanent place for God's holiness to reside, for generations to come. But he also knew that God is not confined to any building. "How could God possibly live on earth? If heaven, even the highest heaven, can't contain you, how can this temple that I've built contain you?" (1 Kings 8.27) God is bigger than that building; God is bigger than *this* building; God cannot be

contained in *any* set of walls. Yet God also desires that people come together to worship him, and so we need a place set aside for doing that, a place worthy of holy worship offered to the Lord our God. So we build our buildings, and we dedicate them for the service of the God who transcends *all* buildings.

But at the end of the day, there's another temple we need to be building. Solomon's temple was marvelous, and this old stone church is also marvelous, but there's another temple that needs our constant care and attention, a temple not made with hands: the temple of our hearts. The apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians *that's* the temple that really *matters*. "Don't you know that *you* are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in *you*?" (1 Corinthians 3.16) He compares himself to a "wise master builder," yet he was not in the business of building *buildings*. He was in the business of building *faith*. His work was not with *stones*, but with *souls*. His ancient words ring out like a trumpet blast: "No one can lay any other foundation besides the one that is already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3.11) Our lives need a *foundation*, a strong and solid foundation, on which to stand. Peter wrote similarly in his first epistle: "You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2.5) What we do here in buildings like this isn't just for *God's* benefit. It's also for *ours*. Yes, we give God our worship and our praise, but we also give God our *hearts*. We offer ourselves wholly – heart, soul, mind, and strength – to our Lord Jesus Christ. God's Spirit blows in our midst, and our hearts are stirred, our souls built up, our minds engaged, our strength empowered, as we continually grow in the ways of Jesus, and minister to the world in Christ's name. Church buildings don't exist just so we can conduct a worship service every week. No, they exist so that people can *grow*. Can *change*. Can *mature*. Can become more *faithful*. More *generous*. More *patient*. More *joyful*. More *peaceful*. More *gentle*. More *loving*. More *holy*. More ... more like *Jesus*.

This building? Yes, it's important. It's *very* important. All the work that many of you did, all those contributions that many of you offered, and continue to offer – that was all important, and necessary, for this building to continue to serve God's purposes in the 21st century and beyond, and we're tremendously grateful for *all* of it. But we also recognize: it's what happens *after this dedication service is over* that *really* matters. It's the ongoing study and service and ministry that we *all* do as we seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ, here in this building and beyond, that will tell the world *why* we did what we did here. We're not here just to enjoy this building. We're here to worship and serve Jesus Christ. This building, beautiful as it is, is merely an instrument for his purposes. The building that matters most is the one *you* are creating in your heart and soul. There's something more important than *any* church building: the church's one foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord. It's what he's calling us to do, and who he's calling us to become. *That's* why we renovated this old stone church: so we can continue to worship, continue to learn, continue to serve, continue to share, continue to grow in the ways of Jesus Christ; so we can, each one of us, truly become a spiritual temple, built like living stones.

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