



On the Occasion of the Closing of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Building

June 6, 2021

The Second Sunday After Pentecost

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“I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'”

With those familiar words, the Psalmist captures the joy and anticipation, the gift, of approaching a place of worship, a place of welcome and peace, a house of belonging, of memory, meaning and hope.

For the Psalmist it was the city of Jerusalem, the holy city, and the splendid temple that stood at the very heart of Israel's life, the temple in which God's presence was real and deeply felt.

For many in this room today, it has been this beloved building so simple in design, yet so sturdy and serene in its setting, that has, for over a span of 62 years, invited and welcomed you to enter its doors with gladness.

But what sparks that gladness, that anticipation?

Tom Long, in a book that probes our reasons for gathering, retells a story told by the writer Harry Goldman. As a child, Goldman could never quite figure out why his father, a self-proclaimed agnostic, would always be going to the synagogue—whenever its doors opened. He was puzzled. Finally, as a teenager he summoned the courage to ask. “You always say you doubt that God exists, but yet you go to the synagogue all the time. Why?” “Well,” replied his father, “there are many reasons to go to the synagogue. “Take Silverberg. He goes to talk to God. Me? I go to talk to Silverberg.” Whether we come to this place for one reason or the other—for conversing with God, or communing or connecting with one another, or, even better, for a genuine mingling of one with the other, there is gladness in our hearts. We are drawn to the presence of God. God invites us here. We come to be enlightened and encouraged, to be affirmed, to be comforted, and sometimes necessarily dis comforted, by hearing God’s Word . . . God’s Word—calling us, stirring and shaking us, into faithful living. We are drawn into the presence of God—to taste the very living presence of the crucified-risen One in the simple yet profound gifts of bread and wine, the healing mercies of forgiveness so freely poured out for us, our lives renewed, restored and bonded as one in him who loves us beyond measure. In Christ we are drawn into life together, our eyes opened to see one another as God’s beloved people, our lives opened to welcome, to listen and to tend to one another, our joys and sorrows, laughter and tears, dreams and discouragements shared with one another. “I was glad when they said to me— ‘Come, let us go to the house of the Lord,’” to this very house at 3680 Whitney Avenue, at the foot of that imposing yet quiet Sleeping Giant, nearly across from Wentworth’s Ice Cream (sadly closed on Sundays), drawn here into the presence of God and drawn into the midst of human community woven together by God’s hand, drawn into community to talk with Ruth, with Chuck and Fran, with Rob, with Nick, with Jim and Joanne, with Paul, with Dawn, with Sharon and Phil, with folks we haven’t yet met but who hunger for this gladness, because that’s what community in Christ is meant to be—

always expanding and new and inclusive.

There's a hymn in our now fairly new red book that I really like.

But since I don't think it is familiar to most of us,

I decided not to stir you up with something new today.

The song was written by a Dutch poet and theologian, Huub Oosterhuis.

It's titled: "*What is this place?*"

It begins: "*What is this place where we are meeting?*

Only a house, the earth its floor.

Walls and a roof sheltering people,

windows for light, an open door.

Yet, it becomes a body that lives

when we are gathered here, and know that God is near."

Only a house ... only a building. This house. This building.

Yet a building so carefully tended to, restored and renewed and loved for 62 years ...

a house that became home because of what happened here within it—

the life-giving moments when God's Word and our calling to be "little Christs" to one another came alive and stunningly real and expansive;

the life passages marked and celebrated—baptisms, confirmations, weddings,

and yes, funerals along the way;

the friendships made and deepened;

the assurance of warm hugs and embraces when loneliness and struggle were raw;

the cries of broken hearts under the weight of shattering grief heard and shared;

the disappointments and doubts that plagued you;

the whispers of forgiveness when all seemed lost and broken;

the unexpected graces of light breaking through the darkness;

the bounty and joy of coffee hours and potlucks and dinners well served;

the happy voices of little ones roaming and running the hallways and aisles;

the music, the singing, lifting and carrying you.

Only a house ... walls and a roof sheltering people,

windows for light, an open door ...

Yet, yet, far, far more than "only a building."

For it came to life when you entered it and gathered here...

you, the beloved people of God,

called together to be the vibrant Church in this place,

imperfect and flawed yet beloved, always-being-made-new.

You came gladly because you knew God met you here,

that God was near,

feeding, empowering, enlivening you in the company of one another,

and then sending you from this place,

sending you to be the Church in the world, in your homes,

your neighborhoods and schools and arenas of public discourse,

in your workplaces, your play-scapes and every place in between.

Today we give thanks
that all those things that gave life to this beloved building
will not be left behind within these walls
but will indeed go with you into a new place, a new house,
into a new and still emerging community of faith into which God has called
all of you together.

Today—a day long and carefully and prayerfully considered,
a day that has arrived not without its own weighty package of melancholy and grief
but even more with bold, decisive courage and trust in the Spirit's leading—
today is a day
to gather into your hearts all those memories of ministry and life together in this place,
to carry them like a sacred ark into a new place where God meets us.

This building might be closed for our ministry and life together today,
but what is most precious and most important goes with us.

Doors close. New doors open.

Today we let go in order to take hold of God's sturdy hand leading us.
You, God's people, are on the move into new places and days of promise.
Buildings will not in the end define us.

Our calling to be God's people, to proclaim the Gospel
so vital and so needed in our broken, deeply wounded and hungry-for-hope world defines and
directs us.

Peter the apostle today reminds us of our timeless, ever new calling and purpose:

*"For you are a chosen, gifted people, a holy nation,
God's own beloved people
in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him
who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light."*

So, in trust we take our leave from this place today.

In expectation we journey.

With compassion and courage we bear witness to the God who makes all things new,
the God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all
we can ever ask or imagine.

In gladness and hope we go as one and gather again in the new house
to which God calls and welcomes us and from which we will go and serve.

Today we sing thanks be to God for all that has been
and for all that is yet to be.

Amen.

LRS