

SERMON TITLE- "The Real Deal"

TEXT- 2 Corinthians 3

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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Today is the BIG celebration of the project we began some years ago. For nearly 20 years our church building was “home” to us. When we built it, as a congregation of 30 people it seemed like a magnificent undertaking- and it was. Thankfully, however we grew out of it and that was a good thing.

However building too small has a real downside- changing is not easy and is expensive so for years we puzzled how to tackle the challenge- finally this spring we stepped in a did it.

Here is a video that tells part of the story.

There are a lot of people we need to acknowledged and any list is going to be too short but let me try to hit a couple of main groups-

1. The contractors we saw a lot of-

Miroslaw Paprotny and Zeidler Partnership Architects

[Ron Martens and Keystone]

Bob Colclough- project manager to get us launched

The Dueck brothers- Blair and Dean

Westbay Mechanical

Den Mar

2. Our team- to name the most

Peter Fehr

Henry Rempel

Barry Simpson

Albert Hubbka

Sean Scheer- Building Committee

3. The Office Team-

Carol Lade

Karen Travers

Ryan Dueck

Colin Dick

4. Everyone who has contributed in big ways and small

A Prayer of Blessing and Thanks for the workers

Leader: In six days the Lord God made the heavens and the earth, and everything in them.

All: O Lord, You are the carpenter of creation,
the weaver of worlds.

You have blessed us, Your creatures, with labour,

and ask us to work honestly and with integrity,
employing our skills in ways that tell the world
that we are serving You.

Leader: On the seventh day God finished all the work of His hands, and He rested from all His labors.

All: Thank you for the goodness of work,
and for the rest we can enjoy when the work is done.
Thank you for the gift of fellow labourers,
and the fulfillment that comes with completion.
Help us to honour all of those
whose gifts and skills have contributed to creating this new space.
Help us to be grateful and joyful workers
in your kingdom.

Leader: This is the day that the Lord has made.

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Today is a good day. It is a day of celebration and completion and as we
celebrate- we are reminded that even in doing so we have a pattern that is laid out for us.

The most famous Biblical example of a building completion celebration, of
course, took place when Solomon completed the building of the great Jewish temple,
1000 years before Jesus- or 3000 years ago.

Sometimes we feel like we worked long and hard at our building project but it
was really nothing compared to what Solomon had done. The specific building project
took 20 years and that doesn't include the decades that his father David had put in
designing and assembling materials.

When it was done the dedication was massive and had a divine intervention as
well-

**When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the
burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The
priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled
it. 2 Chronicles 7:1-2**

**When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above
the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they
worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures
forever." 2 Chronicles 7:3**

That is THE building dedication of all time but even though it is obviously not
what happens every time- it serves as a good reminder to us on several counts.

#1. Our Purpose- The Glory Of God

Anyone who knows me knows that I love to build things. I would build just
because it is fun. If we were to start another building project tomorrow I would be very
happy and ready to go. That joy is a true blessing when you are building but it is

important to be very clear that is not what has driven this project.

Whenever I have built something I stand back and admire my work. Often I call other people to come and take a look at it as well. There is a sense in which we are doing that today. It is what Solomon did when he dedicated the temple.

But even as he did so God added His piece to the program. Today as we look at what has been accomplished, I hope that we are mindful of this divine aspect of our building project as well.

I hope that all those who worked on the renovation have enjoyed it the way but as we stand here today we do well to remind ourselves again that we have put these efforts in for a much grander project than even the wonderful building we admire around us. We are here building a “house” dedicated specifically to the service of God.

That is an awesome thing to have been part of and I trust that all of us can receive the blessing of it today just as the nation stood in awe when Solomon’s temple was dedicated.

As much as the dedication of Solomon’s temple is a wonderful, if somewhat overwhelming, picture for today- it also serves as a point of important contrast for us- and the contrast conveniently takes us back to the our study in 2 Corinthians.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 2 Corinthians 3:1-2

We are clearly entering a conversation that is underway- part of which we looked at last week but without reviewing we can move forward to something that fits directly into what we are doing here today.

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 2 Corinthians 3:3

The difference that we must take note of, when we look at the story of Solomon’s temple, is that with Jesus’ coming to earth- a big shift has taken place in how God wants His people.

When Solomon built the temple it was THE place where God’s people were instructed to go to worship. It was THE place where God’s presence was to be. It was a holy place.

But when Jesus came He first introduced the change. That introduction came in a meeting with a Samaritan woman and went like this. She asked Him the ultimate religious question-

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." John 4:19-20

This is a question that we sometimes struggle with. In a world full of religions and religious ideas- how on earth does one know which one is right? Jesus’ was ready however.

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:21-24

What Jesus said was, the old way of there being a holy place or a holy person

through which we need to get to God- would soon be done.

A new way of approaching God came with His advent.

With Easter that transition was complete and now-

#2. The Kingdom Of God Focuses On People

When we have a big “thing” celebration it is good to be reminded of this fact.

As I mentioned, if we began another building project tomorrow, I’d be ready to go. Having joy to build is a great blessing when you are doing building projects. I hope that even those who may not be as passionate about building things as I am still experienced some of the joy of the process.

But we are doing all this work for a purpose that is very clear- we are on the assignment of building people. This is what Paul worked so hard for- and his successes and failures, his joys and sadnesses, all linked back here.

Why is this good to be reminded of at times like this? Because it gives perspective and correct focus to our efforts. We are not building monuments to creativity or even hard work- we are building a building that is here so that true challenge of seeing the letter of God’s Word carved into our hearts and then show itself as we serve Him in our city is strengthened.

To do that we had to face very specific challenges-

- we have building regulation challenges
- we have structural challenges
- we have expense challenges
- we have time challenges

In each case we need to figure out how we will tackle these.

Even in this, however there is a lesson in how the Kingdom of God works in the world.

There is always a temptation to disconnect one part of life from another. Anyone who works at building a building knows that it is all interconnected and even how we tackle very practical challenges is NOT separated from the invisible business of having the letters of God’s Word carved into our hearts.

Once we understand what our true assignment is we being to understand something else-

#3. The Grand Contrast

Paul explains it like this-

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory . . . If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 2 Corinthians 3:7-9

What does he mean, when he says, “the ministry that condemns men”? After all weren’t the grand temple and the Law that accompanied it amazing?

Of course they were. They were the means by which men and women could have access to God. That was astonishing but there is something that happens to everything that is linked to the material world- it rots and dies. That’s just how life on this earth is- and remains- for all its glory.

When we saw the slide show you may have noticed the old cross that used to be our church’s signature. When we dismantled it we discovered that it was completely

rotten- it was held up by the stucco.

The reality of our new, much improved cross with rain screens to keep it from rotting- will still rot away over time. The very best that we can do is slow down the process- and we work very hard at that.

But the Kingdom work that we are undertaking is not of that nature- it is the work of eternity. It has its visible working out in the day to day lives of the Kingdom community but it looks to a far different place for its meaning.

And when we understand this we understand Paul when he says-

And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! 2 Corinthians 3:10-11

We look at the building that we have worked at with such care and have employed the best skills at our disposal. We celebrate the building because it is a reminder of the real building that we are engaged in- and what a glorious product God is working on.

And Paul closes off with these words-

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold . . . being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

The reminder that I believe all of us, who worked in real time with real challenges on this project, get from all this is- we have not arrived. In fact there is a very long way to go. The longer you work in the real world the more you know that life is about crosses filled with rot.

But when we really understand our assignment this knowledge doesn't have to get us down- it just means we keep pressing forward on the real assignment- getting the living Word of God carved into our hearts and the hearts of the members of our community.