

May 1, 2016
Ephesians 2:19-22
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“Uncontained”

Building for Christ logo on screen

Good morning! You’ve probably noticed -- I hope you’ve noticed -- the Building for Christ logo which is on the front of the bulletins and up on the screen. Some of you will remember it from the capital campaign which we started in 2004 in preparation for designing and constructing this building. The roofline on the logo is from the south elevation of the building plans, and the stone work below was our best guess at the time of what kind of stone might end up as part of this structure.

I remember at the time we introduced the campaign, someone complaining that they were tired of hearing about the *building* all of the time. Although there was a lot of discussion about this structure, and a lot of time and effort from the Cornerstone Team, as you have heard, I think the comment about talking about the building all the time missed the point. Pardon me while I regress to a grammar lesson: Building is a noun, of course: as in “This is a building.” But building is also a gerund, a verb form which indicates ongoing action: as in “We are building,” or even better, “We are in the process of building.” Of course, the clause “for Christ” fits with either form: This is a building for Christ or We are in the process of building for Christ. Not only was this some clever grammar on the part of the campaign planners back in 2004, they didn’t even have to come up with the idea themselves, the apostle Paul had already figured it out in the second chapter of Ephesians.

Slide down.

I'd invite us to turn our attention to the gerund sense of this phrase: how we as a congregation and family of faith are in the ongoing process of building for Christ. Listen again to how Paul describes this building. It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God." We are the building. Paul is kind enough to let us know that he is using a metaphor by qualifying that we are built together *spiritually*, as opposed to being physically bricked in to the structure. But whatever image we have of church -- a church, the Church -- (*you can do this with me*) it had better include people. And it had better be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Buildings, whether they are ornate or simple, massive or tiny, all have a common function: they enclose space. We appreciate buildings for their aesthetics, for the heating and air-conditioning they contain, and for the roof which keeps the rain off our heads, but what we need is the space which they provide. Whether it's a cathedral or a Dunker meeting house, a church is a container for ministry. This Creekside container has served us well over the past ten years -- maybe even better than the Cornerstone Team imagined. When I see this broad chancel on Easter morning or hang things above your heads on Pentecost, or see the Sunday School rooms filled, or attend an open house or baby shower or birthday party in the Gathering Area, or see 100 kids for the Easter Egg Hunt, or 100 women for a retreat, or the EYN Women's choir, I think: it is such a blessing to have this beautiful, accessible, and well-designed space. And I pray that we will continue to find ways to use it for the glory of God and our neighbors' good: may it always be a space where everyone is welcome.

A church is a container for ministry, but it is also a container for something else, something which is harder to get ahold on: a church is a container for mystery -- a mystery which cannot be contained. It is the mystery of how this space and we ourselves become a dwelling place for God. We are not just any people, we are God's people, and this is not just any building, it is a building for Christ. We are built together spiritually on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ for the sake of that which cannot be contained. For the faithful love of God, for the

grace and salvation of Jesus Christ, for the power and inspiration of the Spirit: these things are bigger than we are, and transcend any structure we can imagine. And yet, these are the things which build us together -- which fill the intimate spaces between us and make us stronger as a community than we could ever be by ourselves.

It is my conviction, sisters and brothers, that it is the things we cannot contain in this building and cannot contain in ourselves which are the things that shape our identity as followers of Jesus and as a dwelling place for God. The worship and the vision which we share within this building are important because they send us forth from this building into our neighborhoods and communities and workplaces and schools, and equip us to be God's people in the world. Ministry that is contained in this building is only a part of who we are called to be. It's the same for us as individuals: think about what is uncontained in your own life -- joy, skepticism, enthusiasm? What do other people see in you when you're just being yourself? I believe our actions speak -- maybe even louder than our words -- but if we are filled with excitement about the grace of Jesus Christ which we have experienced; we won't be able to contain that. We'll want to talk about it; we'll want to invite other people to experience that grace, too. If we are filled with a Spirit of welcome and hospitality when guests come through our doors, people will notice. If we're suspicious or judgmental, they'll notice that, too. Believe me. What is uncontained speaks louder than our best intentions. The commitment of growing into a holy temple in the Lord means participating in the construction of bringing our own opinions and desires into alignment with what God wants for us. That's the only way the structure will hold.

Finally, I want to affirm that this sacred space is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul says the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone: that is, the stone which holds the whole structure together. We did not lay that foundation, and we don't have the power to tear it up, but we can build on it. In fact, for those who believe and have chosen to follow Jesus, we stake our lives on that foundation; we stake our promise of the past, our purpose for the present, and our hope for the future on that foundation. In all that we are and all that we do, may we be building for Christ. And all God's people said: Amen.