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Peace, Sun Prairie

July 22, 2018

Farewell Service for Building at 232 Windsor St.

Ephesians 2:19-22

CHRIST'S CHURCH LIVES ON

Saying farewell to our church building. I think it's safe to say we have mixed emotions on a day like this. Let's call it a bittersweet occasion. To some of us it is more bitter and to some of us it is more sweet. Who's right? How should a person feel about this day? This morning Christ uses His Word to mitigate our mixed emotions and to help us see beyond outward appearances to the reality that He promises. From Ephesians 2 the Holy Spirit gives us this assurance: Christ's Church lives on.

It is not a silly thing to feel some heartache over a church building's closing. There might be a few here today who remember the day this building was first dedicated 66 years ago -when it was shiny and pristine, the best of modern technology. It seemed like the congregation had suddenly leapt forward into the second half of the twentieth century. Many of you can scan the interior of this building, especially the

fellowship hall, with a firsthand understanding of the hours and hours of labor, skilled tasks, painstaking planning and the costs involved in its construction -all poured into this place as an act of gratitude, an act of worship to our gracious God.

When one ponders the congregational life that took place here -the decades of children's beaming faces with their new sweaters and bows and runny noses seated on rows of chairs in the chancel belting out their recitations of the Savior's birth, bright faces of young people in gowns reciting their confirmation vows, the buzz of excitement to see a new mom with a bundle wrapped in a baptismal gown, or saying farewell to companions who lay here in repose, the conversation and concern of fellow Christians amidst the tangled legs of tables and chairs at a potluck or lingering in the entry way that you just didn't enjoy the same way anywhere else -all of it took place here.

But that's not the half of it. There's infinitely more. It was at this place, all these years, within these four walls and under this roof, that God Himself regularly crossed over from His world into ours. God Himself met with us in the form of Words and water and bread and wine.

Again and again through these channels He washed our sins away and took us as His own and gave Himself to us –body and blood. He breathed new life into us and rescued us from death and hell and satan. Over and over He forgave us, settled His peace on us, filled us with His Spirit, enlightened us and gave us eternal life and the promise of the resurrection. Week after week through His ministers He visited us with His grace and mercy and comfort and strength and life and hope and wisdom.

It all happened here. We heard it; we bathed in it; we tasted it. It is so awesome that, like Moses, a person would be inclined to take his shoes off out of regard that we are standing on holy ground.

Understandably this building holds a special place in our hearts. And yet it is just that, isn't it –a building? Wood and brick and carpet and glass. It's a tool. A tool that has served us mightily. We have used this facility to its capacity and beyond for the work of God's Kingdom. But take note, Moses did not remain on that mountain with his shoes off. He had work to do in Egypt.

And God has blessed our labors. Leaving this facility is not a curse, not a punishment. It's a graduation! It is a reward from God who has caused His Gospel to produce abundant fruits for salvation -even as He promised it would. Why are we surprised that God has done what He said He would do? God has increased our ministry. It has grown to the point that it is no longer feasible to remain here without shutting our eyes to the gaping doors of opportunity for the Gospel that the Lord has opened to us in Sun Prairie.

That's why it is so important to remember: though God has visited us here so many times, God doesn't actually live in this building. God has chosen to dwell in a much longer-lasting structure, an everlasting temple. Ephesians 2 tells us that God has chosen to dwell in you and me, His believers, the people who are His Holy Christian Church. That is a Church that lives on.

The wonder is that God would use us for His building materials. We are flesh but He is Spirit. We are polluted with sin but He is holy. We are alien to His Kingdom. But God says in Ephesians 2, *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens.*

Illegal immigration is currently a major political issue in the United States. You see, a person cannot just decide to join a country and declare himself a citizen. It doesn't work that way. You are not a citizen until the government declares that you are a citizen. In the same way, we did not have the authority to decide to be citizens of God's Kingdom. God Himself out of sheer kindness declared us to be citizens of His Kingdom. The baptismal font was God's Ellis Island. The Bible says, *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions –it is by grace you have been saved.*

Dead, infected flesh that we were, Christ became one of us and as our substitute took on Himself the blame for all our sinfulness. He suffered the fair and damning judgment of God as He hung on the cross. Now because of Christ's sufferings and death God has declared us clean, fresh, holy, and forgiven -fit to be citizens of His holy Kingdom! In our baptism the Holy Spirit gave birth to our faith in Christ and made us spiritually alive. And God made His home in us. We are His household, His Church. God says in Ephesians 2, *In Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being*

built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So that it will live on, God has built His Church on a sure foundation –the Holy Scriptures. Ephesians 2 says, *you are members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* God used the apostles and prophets to write the Scriptures but Christ is its author and the main subject of every page. God's Word is more solid than the ground beneath our feet and more lasting than the sky over our heads. Jesus said, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

The Holy Spirit uses this everlasting Word to keep us with Christ and save us eternally. By His own promise, you will never hear or read the Word of God without the Holy Spirit coming to you. What He has done for us in the past years through preaching and Bible classes and Scripture Lessons and devotional reading and pastoral counseling and parental guidance and sanctified conversation, He will continue to do for us whether here or a mile and a half from here or a 100 miles from here because He remains with us and lives in us through His Word.

Stop and consider what Ephesians 2 is telling us. You appropriately have a high regard for this building. Consider the high regard God has for you, saying YOU are His building and that He lives in YOU. It is you He has redeemed, you He has cleansed, you with whom He has made His home, you He declares to be His Zion. It is not wood or stone He cares about. It is you. And you will continue to live for as long as the eternal God remains and lives in you. You are a Church that lives on!

As we go forth to fulfill our mission at a new location, we do so with optimism and joy. For if God has blessed us to the point that it has become necessary to leave behind this place, what kinds of blessings can we look forward to on our Gospel work in the future? May God continue to bless our labors at the Stonehaven campus as we continue to engage in the work of church-building there -not just the constructing of steel and tile, but adding brick upon brick, that is, soul upon soul, to the spiritual temple that has Christ as its chief cornerstone. In this way may we continue building a Church that lives on.