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Pentecost 22 B – October 24, 2021

“I will be your God”

Read: Leviticus 26: 1 - 13 /Memorize: Leviticus 26: 12

From the very beginning, God’s plan was that He would dwell with His people . Might we call the garden the first church? They had a definite place where they would meet. Unfortunately, sin broke that relationship apart, but God is not easily dissuaded from His plan. We see His grace and mercy throughout the Old and New Testament.

In Leviticus 26, God tells His people the benefits of being His people. Among them were peace in the land, good harvest and most importantly, His presence. In Lev. 26: 12 we hear “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”

Here’s how important a place for God to dwell among his people was. In Exodus 25 God gives them His directions for the Tabernacle, which is tent-like, and all its elements, which will be the pattern for the Temple. It takes six chapters of Exodus to accomplish this.

Now remember, they’re in the wilderness, wandering, so they’re going to have to take it down and put it up every time they move. Yet, they rejoiced in the opportunity because the tabernacle was God’s place of presence among them.

When David decided he wanted to build a home for God, God forbid him to do so because of his warrior past. God’s other objection was that a house would contain Him. He wanted to dwell among His people. God made His point, but also promised David that someday Solomon would built it.

I think God realized how important it is for people to have a physical place where they can come and connect with Him. It took Solomon 12 years to build that Temple. It was a very nice. Unfortunately, because of the disobedience of Solomon and the people, the Babylonians would destroy that temple.

In the years before Jesus was born, several hundred years after Solomon's temple was destroyed, Herod the Great began to build a much bigger and grander temple. It would take forty-six years for that temple to be completed. That was the Temple Jesus would cleanse, throwing out those who were profiting off the worship of God.

We Christians sometimes get a little confused about this. We equate temple with church. The purpose of the temple was a place for ritual sacrifice. The priests would carry out the ceremonial law, offering sacrifices for the various sins and other sacrifices that the law demanded.

The temple had one other important purpose. It was the place where Gentiles could come to know God. In fact, the largest court of the temple was given over to that mission. Jesus and His disciples frequented that temple, meeting people, engaging in relationships and teaching them. They saw it as a place where they could develop relationships with people to help them to know who God really was. That's a part of our purpose.

Our congregation was established in 1960. If you came to the forums you heard Gayle Hendershot talk about meeting at the Cooperative extension. Each weekend, people would come set up chairs for worship; then after worship reverse the process to restore it. Our ministry was hindered because we had no place to use to carry out mission and ministry during the week.

Not very long after we became an official congregation, planning began for a place, a place we could use it as a ministry center. In 1964, we built our old building in the corner of this lot we bought from Howard Samuels, a businessman.

Someone once told me that we built on the corner of the love because the first pastor planned to build a cathedral to the north. That didn't happen, but we've certainly fulfilled the plan to use the building to serve the community.

We dedicated the new part of our building in 2006. It's hard to believe it's about 15 years old. Even back then, we realized that this part of the building needed renovation, but we didn't have the funds to do it. Our renovation won't be as grand as Herod's temple, but we do want it to be a place that is warm, welcoming and attractive to people.

We have been gathering information for a while about this part of the campaign. It will be a big undertaking. Beyond that, it has a lot of emotional content. This is where we need to be careful. It is very easy to design it for our wants. After all, we're going to pay for it and we think of it as ours.

We have to be careful about that type of thinking. This is God's house and God has a plan for His home. He wants it to be a place where all people will come to meet Him, just as the temple was. It's awful easy to just take our concerns and desires into account. We're all here and we have plenty to say.

However, there are things we need to consider. For generations to come who is going to come here? What will their needs be? We live in a community where the population is growing older. We see that already as we come to worship. We have people with walkers and other assistive devices. How will we make provision for them? What does this worship space need to look like in order to accommodate those needs now and future needs to come?

Beyond that, here's a greater concern. Because we are people we like things to remain the same. Cohocton is a sleepy, little village 35 miles south of us. It has a couple of hundred residents and two Lutheran churches for over a hundred years.

What happened? Back then, one day, a person put a cross on the altar at the church. A bunch of people objected. The people who were for the cross objected right back. Pretty soon, they were saying things to each other that were not very nice. The cross people walked out to build their own church. The non-cross people were glad to see them leave. Unfortunately, they still don't get along.

Two weeks ago, in my sermon, I mentioned that Rick Warren begins his book "Purpose Driven Life" with this statement "It's not about you." We need to be careful as we renovate the sanctuary, or make any decision, that we don't choose to make it about us, rather than about God. We want to consider the people who will come for generations. That's a hard thing to do because we don't know who they are yet. With God's grace and His wisdom He will help us keep our focus on Him and His desire, rather than ours.

There have been conversations, but not one decision has been made about what we're going to do with this physical space. We need to pray and talk. We want to remember it's God's house. God wants this to be a place where people can meet Him, get to know Him, come to believe in Him and then serve Him. When we do that we will be blessed and be a blessing. God dwells in the hearts of His people, not a building. He says to us: "Go!" The response He wants to hear from us is, "Yes, Lord."

There are people who don't know Jesus, yet, right around us. They won't meet Him unless we go beyond the building. We go with the Good News of Jesus and His love. There is no lack of people who need that love. Let us be on the alert for them; then be bold in developing a relationship with them. That can lead to an opportunity that allows us to invite them into a deeper walk with Jesus as disciples. That's been the mission for generations. It remains the mission "For Generations to Come."

Here's your question: Who are you taking the Good News of Jesus to?