

*Pastor Michael O'Neill*

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## **Overflow - Part 5**

*Psalm 84; Matthew 18:19*

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## **Overflow: Part 5**

### **Dedication of Updated Worship Space<sup>1</sup>**

Today we're taking a pause in our time together using the Scriptures from our readings in our Lenten devotional book because today's a special day. Today we want to recognize the overflow of God's love for us in this place.

The last time we were in here, there was a lot of orange...and tan and burgundy and dark curtains and dirty stone décor and beat up old wood treatments. There was a dirty and dingy popcorn ceiling above us. There was some very old, very discolored and stained carpet. By the way, you remember the orange pews, right? Did you know that in the 1970s when this space was built and those orange pews were put in, the original carpet was red? Yep, red carpet and orange pews. It was all the rage fifty years ago. So we wanted to continue to honor and acknowledge the past. There is a piece of the past with us that you might not even know. Fifty years ago, when they put that red carpet down, they also put a piece of it in a very unique place that you've probably never noticed, but it's been with us all along. We decided to keep it as an homage to the past. Do you know where it is? Look up!

Those were great days in the past, and now, by the grace of God, things are updated. Now we are in a bright, beautiful, comfortable space. It is a place where God has done and will continue to do amazing things.

During this time of transition, we've acknowledged all the great ways that God has moved in our lives in the past. We've shared those stories in writing and in video.

Now, by the grace of God, here we are in this space. In many ways, a house of God. And it is beautiful. As the Psalmist says, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." That's from Psalm 84, and today we are going to look at that Psalm – a psalm written about the beauty of the Temple, a psalm that applies today as we give thanks to God for this space that He has given us and our community through the generosity of his people, through his power and love.

I'd like to read that Psalm to us, and can I ask you to stand as I read it to us? (Notice how quiet those seats are? Two types of return mechanisms – spring and gravity. College Church...herd of horses...Renovation Team wisely...) So, Psalm 84:

How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord Almighty!  
My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place*, Don Schultz, Nov. 28, 2017 (<https://sermoncentral.com/sermons/how-lovely-is-your-dwelling-place-o-lord-almighty-don-schultz-sermon-on-lordship-of-christ-96711>)

my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.  
Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.  
As they pass through the Valley of Baka,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.  
Look on our shield, O God;  
look with favor on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.  
For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
the Lord bestows favor and honor;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless.

Lord Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

(Psalm 84, niv)

Thank you for standing; you can be seated.

Many people believe that the person who wrote this psalm was trapped in a place where he couldn't go to God's temple. The writer may have been in captivity, or separated from the temple because of war, and that's why he wrote, "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord, my heart and flesh cry out for the living God." The writer was saying, "I wish I could be there. I wish I could be in God's temple, because that's where God lives. That's where God dwells. Even the birds can go there, as they build their nests in the eaves of the temple. And those who are able to go, are blessed – 'Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you.'"

As we dwell in this modern house of God today, we also can praise God for all the good things that He has done for us through the generations. He has been so faithful, and we

have many folks in our church family who have seen his faithfulness through the generations. We have folks who were here when this space was originally built, and they've seen God continue to be with us. One of those couples is Norm and Lynnett Koenig. Let's listen to their testimony.

As we look into the past, we think of all the things that God did, to make this space possible. Was it just luck in the 1950s that a small group of Christians was able to build a church on this prime piece of real estate – given to them by the Congdon family? Or was it the hand of God? Was it luck that the Congdons later sold even more land to our church for pennies on the dollar? Then later to sell the church even *more* land that we now occupy, land that yesterday we used to bless 4,000 members of our community, that they were able to enjoy at Upward Soccer? Was it luck that led the church in the late 1990s to expand into the building we now enjoy? Was it luck that three years ago – twenty years after the church took on great debt – that we were able to pay off a million-dollar mortgage during the pandemic when we couldn't even meet together in person? Was it luck that we've been able to do all these renovations in the foyer restrooms, adult spaces, children's area, and now in here? Or was it the hand of God?

And what about all the members who donated their time, who donated their effort, who made sacrifice after sacrifice, so that we could be in this space today. Alex Robertson who led our Here For Good giving effort, Tom Froula and Steven Stilley who led the Renovation Team, Darcy Armstrong and her team who have overseen the renovation color palettes and decorations? Ron Gill, Stan Askew, Larry Loveless, Mike Stump, Larry Ball, Mike Hedrick, Nathan Durnan...the Leadership Team of the church and Pastors...and all of you who have given sacrificially...can you see the hand of God working through all these people?

And now we can say with the Psalmist, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." Notice how the Psalmist called the Temple God's dwelling place – the building belonged to God. And this building belongs to God as well. It was built and paid for by people, and we are truly thankful for every single person who participated. But ultimately, all credit belongs to God. And ultimately, this building belongs to God. His name should be on the deed. It's HIS dwelling place.

It's true that God is not limited to a building – he lives everywhere. But it's also true that wherever the Word of God is preached, God is there. Wherever two or three gather together around the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God is there. Wherever water and the Word come together in baptism, God is there, bringing a rebirth and renewal by his Holy Spirit. Wherever bread and cup are shared in the same way Jesus shared it with his disciples at the Lord's Supper – the body and blood of Christ "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins" – God is there, forgiving and strengthening his people.

Through his Word, and through his Sacraments, and through your worship, God dwells here. This place is where the message of Christ, crucified for the sins of the world, is proclaimed. Here is where people can receive comfort when they sin, and strength when they are weak. This place is where a young couple can stand before God and promise to love each other for the rest of their lives, and receive God's blessing upon their marriage. Here is where a family can dedicate their baby to the Lord with their family of faith. Here is where people stand before us to commit to membership in our church. Here is where a

family can mourn the loss of a loved one, and receive comfort that their loved one is in heaven, and that someday they will see him or her again at the resurrection.

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you” (Psalm 84:5)

...the Psalmist says. This place is where you can receive strength from God, that special divine strength you need as you face all the problems of today, and all the unknown challenges of tomorrow. “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty.” Here is where God dwells through Word and Sacrament, and speaks to our hearts, and strengthens our souls.

And as you listen to God in this place, you can also speak to him:

“Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty. Listen to me, O God of Jacob.” (Psalm 84:8)

God promises to listen to you as you pray. Of course you can pray to him anywhere, but there’s something special about joining together with other Christians in prayer. As Jesus said:

“If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:19, niv)

Come to this place, and join with your fellow Christians in prayer, and watch how your God will respond to every single one of your prayers, at just the right time, and in just the right way.

For the writer of this Psalm, God’s temple was his favorite place:

“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.” (Psalm 84:10a)

One day in God’s house is better than a thousand days in a resort on the beach.

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.” (Psalm 84:10b)

A doorkeeper isn’t a very prestigious job, even today. To live in some rich person’s place, to have people wait on you and serve you – that was a nice existence. But not for the writer of this Psalm. To dwell in the tents of the wicked might be comfortable. But to stand in front of the house of God, where God lives and blesses and strengthens – nothing is better than that. Just ask the folks who are part of our Guest Services Team, or our Safety Team, or our Worship and Tech Team – they all love to serve in the house of God.

The temple was the Psalmist’s favorite place in the world. It is my prayer that this house of God would become your favorite place too. There are a lot of places in the Pacific Northwest that you can go, and many things you can see and do, especially on the weekends. But it is our prayer that you would rather be a doorkeeper, or a greeter, or an usher, or a Kid’s Caravan teacher, or a custodian, or a singer, or a listener, in the house of your God – I’d rather be here, than in any other place in the world, because this is my favorite place. This is a dwelling place of God.

And as you enjoy God’s blessings here, as you hear the message of Christ crucified and risen for the sins of the world, as you receive comfort and strength from the Sacrament, you will be motivated by God to share your favorite place with others. You see, the updates of this space – the wood and the carpet and the paint and seating – it’s all completed – at least for

this phase. There will be more remodeling to do not too far down the road. But the construction of West Valley Church – the people who hear the Gospel and offer their praise to God – that’s not done. God isn’t finished building his church, his people, in this place.

We see it in the multiple generations that are a vital part of our growing and healthy church. I want you to hear from one of our families who appreciates the priority our church places on loving and serving and discipling our generations – especially the ones who are following us. Watch this video from Bethany Robins.

There’s another new family that God wants sitting in the row of chairs near you. There’s another new couple that God wants sitting in the two chairs next to you. There’s a new believer that God wants baptized here. There’s a young person who just moved into the area, that God wants you to stand next to in worship and share in communion with. I think God wants a problem to develop in this church – a lack of places to sit, as more and more people come to this place.

What is it that would bring them here? The Psalmist gives you the answer:

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield.” (Psalm 84:11a)

He shines in and through *your* life, as he shields you from trouble.

“The Lord bestows favor and honor.” (Psalm 84:11b)

He blesses your life.

“No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (Psalm 84:11c)

None of us are blameless based on our own good works. But every single one of us is blameless because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God withholds nothing from those who place their trust in Jesus:

“O Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.” (Psalm 84:12)

As others see Christ in you, and as you invite folks to join you, that’s what fills this place.

It is our prayer that this building would become a favorite place for more and more people. Through your life, your witness in words and actions, others will see the blessings that God is pouring into your life. And they will want to learn more. By the grace of God they will come here, because this is God’s dwelling place.

Today we dedicate this space to the work of God.

We dedicate this space with hearts that are thankful for all the grace that God has shown to us in the past.

And we dedicate this space with hearts filled with faith, as we look forward to all the blessings God will give to us in the future.

Amen.

## ***Benediction***

"Almighty God, we give you thanks for this space, a place of worship and fellowship, now dedicated to your glory. May this house be a place where your presence is felt, where your Word is proclaimed, and where your people are strengthened in faith. May the walls of this building echo with praise and prayer, and may the hearts of those who gather here be open to your grace. Bless this space and all who enter it, that it may be a beacon of hope and a source of comfort for generations to come. May we, as your people, continue to serve you with joy and dedication, using this space to build up your kingdom. May the blessing of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon us now and forevermore. Amen."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.google.com/search?q=dedication+of+a+church+building+benediction&sca\\_esv=b69d541478bc363a&ei=gN\\_xZ-6hF8PRkPIP7rPPwAw&ved=0ahUKEWju4fKEp8KMAxXDKEQIHe7ZE8gQ4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=dedication+of+a+church+building+benediction&gs\\_l=egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiK2RIZGJjYXRpb24gb2YgYSBjaHVyY2ggYnVpbGRpbmcgYmVuZWRRpY3Rpb25ltF5QxhhYrVxwA3gBkAEAmAHKAaABnxSqAQYwLjE1LjG4AQPIAQD4AQGYAgOgAtACwglKEAAYsAMY1gQYR8ICBRAAGIAEwgILEAAYgAQYhgMYigWYAwClBgQBgiSBwMxLjKgB-YOsgcDMC4yuAfiAg&scient=gws-wiz-serp](https://www.google.com/search?q=dedication+of+a+church+building+benediction&sca_esv=b69d541478bc363a&ei=gN_xZ-6hF8PRkPIP7rPPwAw&ved=0ahUKEWju4fKEp8KMAxXDKEQIHe7ZE8gQ4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=dedication+of+a+church+building+benediction&gs_l=egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiK2RIZGJjYXRpb24gb2YgYSBjaHVyY2ggYnVpbGRpbmcgYmVuZWRRpY3Rpb25ltF5QxhhYrVxwA3gBkAEAmAHKAaABnxSqAQYwLjE1LjG4AQPIAQD4AQGYAgOgAtACwglKEAAYsAMY1gQYR8ICBRAAGIAEwgILEAAYgAQYhgMYigWYAwClBgQBgiSBwMxLjKgB-YOsgcDMC4yuAfiAg&scient=gws-wiz-serp)