

June 20, 2009

**ST. LUKES' CHAPEL DEDICATION SERMON
AT
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH HOME**

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Do you know that you are God's temple, and that God's spirit dwells in you?

We have an amazing richness in the scripture chosen today. Solomon begs God's blessing on the house he has built, especially praying that it be a place of divine forgiveness.

Luke gives us a different view. Jesus, gathered in his small town church in Nazareth, seems to experience the synagogue as a house of study, where we encounter the Bible in such a way that it is read, marked, learned and inwardly digested so that we grow into a community of justice and jubilee – a community of fulfilled Torah, where the blind see, prisoners are free and distributive justice is realized.

But to my mind, the most radical view of the theology of sacred place – the most amazing counterintuitive theology of temple, belongs to the pen of St. Paul. “Do you not know that you are God's temple? These amazing words, this sublime affirmation speaks to the dignity, duty and destiny of the human enterprise, particularly as it is understood by followers of the Lord Jesus Christ!

To proclaim that we are temples of the Holy Spirit is to declare an amazing human dignity. Ever since the angel Gabriel saluted the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary said yes – co-operating with God's project to take on human flesh, to mix and mingle divinity and humanity in the incarnation – ever since that moment, theology and anthropology are as mixed and mingled as divinity and humanity are mixed and mingled in the person of Jesus.

This anthropology that Paul articulated in his letter to Corinth expands our understanding of Christian anthropology. Not only is humankind holy because humanity is created in God's image and is also the chosen garment of God's self disclosure, but – wonder of wonders – God's commitment to us is so definitive, so complete, that God has decided to make each human person a dwelling place, a tent of meeting, a Holy Temple, where the living God is located.

The newly baptized baby is a temple. The openhearted child receiving the Eucharist is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The surgeon taking a moment for prayer before an operation is a temple of the Spirit of the Living God. And on this day of days we proclaim a person confined to a wheel chair, tethered to oxygen, is also a glorious, sacred, treasured and dignified temple of the Holy Spirit!

Those who will be the congregation of this sacred place will no longer be leaned upon, reached over, crowded, warehoused in a hallway, where the Divine Liturgy had all of the dignity of Monday night football at the local sports bar! It was better than that, but, not much!

Also those Episcopalians, Presbyterians and others (residents of Dudley Square) who are pillars of their congregations, on those snow days when driving to their downtown parish is a hazard will be able to worship in this church in a liturgy where they will no longer wonder if they are sitting in a less able-bodied person's space.

Staff, whose only opportunity for Sunday worship is here, will no longer be segregated in the hallway or on the back wall, but will be the ministering angels in the body of Christ that they are.

When the sacramental waters of baptism flow, it might be the great-granddaughter of a resident, or the son of a nurse's aid, and the liturgy might be spoken in Spanish!

This is a house of prayer for all people – in whatever circumstances – who will be treasured upon their arrival as the temples of the Holy Spirit that they are.

Their beings will be respected, their sacred stories honored, their life review work will be undertaken with integrity, their gifts and talents will be celebrated and their offerings received.

Whether a Sunday communicant is a 30-year-old accident victim here for re-hab or a retired CEO from Dudley Square, whether a communicant can say the Lord's Prayer but not his name, or whether a devout Roman Catholic food services worker receives her ashes on Ash Wednesday here in this room – we will cry out before them all: "Make way for a temple of the Holy Spirit!"

I learned a lesson in about 1979 that I will never forget – a lesson taught to me by a bunch of Buddhists. Our parish was settling 11 ethnic Chinese who lived in Vietnam and had to leave at the end of their conflict.

I was driving some of them to an interview at a Washington plant in Ellicott City, MD for job interviews, but I ran out of time and took them to a Eucharist at a nursing home. It was their first visit and for them it was a scene of near horror. In a culture where elderly are revered, treasured and cared for by family, to see so many elders without the comfort of family seemed to them a horror. They made clicking sounds with their tongues and lips, sort of like many of us would have done if we went to a nursery and all the babies were being fed by robots.

I am taken back to that moment frequently just by listening to the news:

- "Social Security is running out of funds."
- "Medicare is under-funded; workforce will not be able to deal with these entitlements."

It is hard to hear these headlines without hearing the veiled or not-so-veiled message of our increasingly youth-obsessed culture that sees elders as a big problem.

In St. Luke's Chapel, another message will be proclaimed. Those of advancing years will enter this shrine and be welcomed, but not as problems or issues or drains on time and resources. Those who enter this chapel will be honored and cherished as the beloved temples of the Holy Spirit that they are!

Those who worship here will be received as living shrines of wisdom and determination; they will be received as living sacraments of lives spent and still being spent in duty, service and mission to their church, business, communities, causes, family and world.

In this glorious space, living dwelling places of God will walk in here and, in the beauty of holiness, will know that they are cherished and valued. They will know themselves ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven and transformed. They will be respected as temples of glory who give glory – as we do – on this day to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to Him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus. Amen.