

The 10th Anniversary of the Dedication of Faith Lutheran Church, Wylie's Building
10 March, Anno Domini 2019
Revelation 21:1-5
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Ten years ago, on March 8 in the year of our Lord 2009, the saints of Faith Lutheran Church here in Wylie along with fellow saints from neighboring parishes, gathered together in celebration and thanksgiving to dedicate this building to the glory of God. After several years of hard work, blood, sweat, and tears, long nights and weekends, disappointments and trials, a shout went up in Christendom and throughout the heavenly realm because here in this community, the Lord had provided a permanent place for His children here gathered to stand in His presence, hear the voice of their Good and gracious Shepherd, and be strengthened and comforted by His gifts of Baptism and the Holy Supper.

For several years, this congregation had been sojourners like our forefathers in the wilderness. We had to rent space. Every week the tabernacle of God was painstakingly set up and then taken down again. Hymnals and Bibles and communion vessels were scattered among the homes of God's children. And every time they had to load and unload their cars, every time they had to unstack and stack again towers of chairs the thought ran through their minds "Will we ever have a place to call our own?" Perhaps they wondered if the congregation would even make it.

But by the good grace of God and the generosity of His people, especially our brothers and sisters in Plano, land was acquired and in 2005, ground was broken on this tabernacle, a permanent place where the glory of God would reside and His people would gather to Him. To God alone be all praise, honor, glory, and worship who has blessed us with this building and continues to preserve and prosper His Word in our midst here.

But if all we are celebrating today is the construction of a building, then we have missed the true glory and importance of this building, the same glory and importance of every building where the Word of God sounds forth. Consider the glory of the temple in Jerusalem. Even Jesus' disciples commented on it only to have Jesus sound the ominous warning, "I tell you the truth, the days are coming when not one of these stones will be left standing on another." In the end, the glorious and beautiful buildings of man are nothing. They are built and they are destroyed, turned to dust. They decay and break and need repairing. It is not, of course, the building that matters. The holiness of the building is not measured by the height of its spire, the length of its nave, or the ornateness of its stained glass windows and carvings. Holiness alone belongs to God. He alone makes ground and buildings and people and things and activities holy. And He has done just that, making us and this building and the things in it and the activities done in it holy, set apart for His purposes. That is truly remarkable.

However, there is something even more remarkable. The Lord Jesus, sitting on the throne of heaven in John's vision, speaks these absolutely profound words "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." Incredible! This isn't something that we could imagine in our wildest dreams! God doesn't make His dwelling place among the angels. He doesn't reside in the heavens far

removed from us where we must search Him out and find Him. God dwells with man! God dwells among us, among sinners. Who are we that the Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, should want anything to do with us, let alone live among us? And not only live among us, but live as one of us! Indeed, what we rejoice in today is that God has made His dwelling among us, here, in Wylie. He deigns to accept this house as His dwelling place where He, the crucified and risen Lord, will be and promises that we may come here and He will be here to bless us with His life-giving and life-preserving Word. Here we will find His comfort and His forgiveness. Here He will put His Name upon us in the words of the Benediction, as He has been doing since the days of Aaron, the first high priest.

Dear sinner, you do not have to search for God. He has not hidden Himself from you. He is here in Word, in water, in bread and wine. Perhaps the surroundings aren't glorious and opulent as we imagine they should be or even piously desire them to be. Perhaps the long-range vision hasn't panned out as we thought it would or should. But these aren't the things that matter. In fact, they ought to be a wonderful reminder to us that God came in great humility in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He came to young Mary and her betrothed, Joseph, who found no permanent home in Bethlehem. He did not come to the rich and influential who believed themselves to be of great importance. He didn't come with shows of great power. Nor did He come for those who were in love with such things and trusted in such things. No, Jesus came to bring salvation to the homes of those who, like Zacchaeus, are small in stature in the eyes of world - insignificant, sinful, broken, weak, and hurting. Jesus came because He wanted to save sinners and stand in their midst as their Lord and Redeemer.

And consider the great work that the Lord, who fills heaven and earth, has done inside these four walls. Think about how many souls have stood at that font and been rescued from sin and death through the washing of Holy Baptism. Think about how many of Christ's hurting sheep have sat where you are sitting right now and had their spirits lifted out of despair as they heard the sweet promises of their Savior. Think about how many have knelt at this communion rail and been fed the Body and Blood of God's Son for the forgiveness of all their sins. Think about the number of Christ's dear lambs who have been taught to know Jesus in Sunday School and catechized in the Christian faith. Think about all the countless anxious and bewildered souls who have sat in the pastor's study to be counseled by God's Word. Think about how many friendships have been born here as we conversed over coffee after service. Think about how many people have walked through those doors back there who had either wandered from the faith or had never even heard of Christ who now call upon their heavenly Father. Think about all the people who have moved here from all over the country and found here a place in their back yard where they can hear the Word of God and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

All this because, in His mercy, God has made His dwelling place with man...with you. This isn't our doing. We are not here to sing our own praises or the praises of those who worked long hours to frame walls, hang drywall, and paint (though we certainly give thanks to God for their faithful service and hard work!). All this is the work of God in our midst, who has said "I must come to this house today. There are sinners here who need me." And what a joy and blessing it is that not only has God provided us with this place but also faithful shepherds who continue to preach His Word of Law and Gospel, calling us to repentance and proclaiming Christ's holy word of absolution. He has continued to bless His Word as it goes forth - strengthening His children in

faith and love and drawing yet more people out of the darkness of sin and death into His glorious light.

Truth be told, there are challenges that lie ahead as Satan, the ancient enemy of God, His Word, and His Church, does all that He can to silence God's Word in this place. But that is to be expected and our fervent prayer is that God would stir up our hearts that we may meet those challenges with prayer and faith in His promises. We will gird ourselves with the strength that God gives us and apply ourselves diligently what lies ahead. We will pray against all of Satan's attacks. We will pray that the Holy Spirit would move our hearts to treasure His Word above all things in heaven and earth. We will ask for the Lord's help that we might hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God which He freely gives through His Word and blessed Sacraments, so that these things are not taken from among us. We will pray that we may not grow cold to the needs of the Church and the needs of our neighbor.

Dear saints of Faith, behold, God has chosen to dwell among us here to save us and to bless us. May He continue to richly bless this congregation and pour out His Holy Spirit among us. Let us daily give thanks to God who has blessed us in this building these last ten years and let us pray that His Word may continue to bear much fruit among us and in this community and that we may enjoy His blessing in this place for many years to come. To God the Holy Trinity be all glory.

In the Name of +Jesus.