

SERMON 831

Seventh Week after the Epiphany

February 23, 2014

934th Week as Priest

760th Week at St Dunstan's

25th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

GOD'S BUILDING

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Sunday morning, I spoke on the subject of God's Garden. Saint Paul told the new Christians in Corinth that they were God's garden, God's farm, God's field.

Today the image is that of God's building. The references in scripture and song are plentiful—"You are the temple of the living God," said Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians. "We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets," he told the Ephesians. "And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself."

Paul loved this image of the church built on a solid foundation. He described his own ministry in this way: "My one ambition is to proclaim the gospel where the name of the Messiah is not known, so I don't build on someone else's foundation." And he reminded his young assistant Timothy, "God's firm foundation stands," and he knows every timber and stone of his church.

Even our hymns express the idea. “Christ is made the sure foundation,” sings forth one of our favorites. “Christ the head and cornerstone, chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one.”

Saint Paul, always a superb writer, loved to turn an image inside out and upside down, in order to show its full significance. Saint Peter, a more direct communicator, even did this a time or two.

“Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious,” he wrote, “and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.’”

And one of Jesus’ favorite parables addressed the building of a house:

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and

beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

Always in the reading of the Bible, we must search for the connection with our own lives and circumstances. Like the construction of a building, we are all works in progress. The foundation of our own lives must be laid carefully and precisely if we are to withstand challenges and difficulties. And our lives, like a building, need continuing attention and care, repairs and renovations from time to time, and perhaps even major remodeling. We are God's temple, and we should remember to treat our physical bodies with respect and responsibility.

And the same is true for churches, for the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. A church not built on the foundation of Christ cannot continue. And if its cornerstone is not Christ himself, then nothing else about the building is square and true and prepared to stand for years and years.

Some people believe that the church is not a building, that it is the *people* who are the church—and this is true in a sense—but there is more to our worship and our tradition than a people gathered in a gymnasium, or an auditorium, or a Butler building. No, for us, the church is a sanctuary, a place of peace and of gathering. The church is made holy in the prayers said here, and it is dedicated to the worship of Almighty God with all that we can bring to our gathering—in sight and sound and smell and touch, in bread and wine, and brass and silver, in wood and window, brick and timber, stone and metal. Our Gothic architecture speaks of centuries of tradition, and it reminds us of our connection with the rest of the Episcopal churches

in our diocese and throughout the United States, and with the people of our Anglican Communion throughout the world, and with the Saints in Light who lived and worshipped God, and built churches and cathedrals, and were living stones built into a spiritual house in their own day.

No, we can no more deny that we are God's building than we can give up our Prayer Book liturgy or our Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. This is who we are, and this is why we came here today—to praise God in the beauty of holiness, to sing hymns and spiritual songs, to offer Christ our very best work and worship in a place where prayer is valid.

And since we have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, we are going to live in union with him. We will keep our roots deep in him. We will build our lives on him, and become stronger in our faith, as we were taught. And we will ever be filled with thanksgiving. For we are God's building. This is what we are. **AMEN.**

956 words