

I Will Build My Church

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost, August 26, 1990. Scripture Lesson: Psalm 127, Matthew 16:13-20.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Last Thursday evening the Session unanimously approved the recommendation of the builder, architect, structural engineers, and soil analysis engineers to demolish ^{The entire CE bldg along with everything else} ~~everything~~ but the bell tower ~~etc.~~ ^{and a back wall had no foundation at all.} ~~It has been discovered that~~ The Christian Education building has inadequate foundations to support a third floor. The demolition will probably begin Tuesday. You'll have opportunity to ask members of the Session and Building Committee questions about this decision after the worship service this morning in the Parish Hall.

At the time of the fire, the fire marshal estimated that we suffered about a 4 million-dollar loss. The architect and builder agree that our new church will cost about 4 million dollars, including steeple, organ and pews.

Where are we going to get that kind of money? We hope that the insurance company will come through with the full replacement value but it may take years before that's settled. So, at present, we're about 2.5 million dollars short of our goal. The good news is that we already have about 1.8 million dollars, so we're 45% of the way there. But that's not enough to begin the building. We can't begin to build until we know where the rest of the money's coming from. The working drawings will take about four months to complete and the architect can't start on them until he knows if we want a 2 million or 4 million dollar dollar church.

There are basically two options: We can drastically scale back our plans. The kitchen has already been scaled back from \$100,000 to about \$53,000. A second option is to give, raise, and/or borrow the 2.5 million dollars.

Personally, I'm confident that we can do this. All we need is 10 people to give \$100,000 each and another 100 to give \$10,000. The rest of us can give \$500,000 over and above our regular giving and we'll have the money.

But why do we want to rebuild? Do we simply want to build a monument to our own glory like those who built the tower of Babel? Or do we really believe that the living God has called us to minister, along with other churches in Oxford, to the whole community? Whether or not the church should be rebuilt depends on how we answer the question Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Is Jesus the Christ? Is Jesus the Son of the living God?

There's a strong notion in the world today that religious beliefs are a matter of taste. Science deals with facts. Religion deals with feelings, opinions and personal tastes. Some people prefer chocolate ice cream to vanilla. Christians prefer Christ to Buddha. Religion is a matter of taste and personal opinion. If that's our view of the Christian faith we can't possibly hope that the Lord Jesus will build his church on that kind of faith.

Peter's confession takes the Christian faith out of the realm of the private and subjective and places it in the public arena. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ. To us that sounds like a religious title but in his day it was a political title. The word *Christ* means *the anointed one*. It's a title given to kings who were anointed with oil at their coronation. Peter is saying that Jesus belongs on the throne of Israel and not Herod.

The church has never been willing to put Jesus in the private world of mere feelings and personal tastes. When Roman authorities required Christians to give their highest allegiance to Caesar, the ruler of the Roman Empire, they refused. "We can't do this", they said. "Christ is Lord, not

Caesar. Christ should be the ruler of the empire, not Caesar. The reign of Christ has already begun and one day Caesar will have to answer to Christ."

In WWII - Hitler is my Führer, Lord. Many yrs subverted... The Compassing Church said no - Christ is my Führer.

Wherever the church has been faithful it has confessed that Christ's kingdom is the ultimate goal of history^{and not national glory, etc} and that all people, everywhere, owe ultimate allegiance to Christ. We believe that Jesus is more than simply our personal Lord and Savior. We believe Christ is Lord and Savior of the world. We believe that Christ is Lord and Savior of the town of Oxford.

Not only that, I believe that Christ has the keys,^{of the Kgdms of Heaven...} not only to heaven, ^{This refers to} but

has the keys to peace between Iraq and the United Nations. I believe that the ^{He} Risen Christ has the keys to the problem of world hunger, the keys to the problem of racism. ^{He} I believe that the Risen Christ has the keys to the problem of tribal warfare in South Africa. ^{He} I believe that Christ has the keys to the rebirth of this town, the keys to drug and alcohol problem, the key to

but the keys to Christ's Kgdms on earth as well.

homeless^{ness}. The keys are right there in the Gospel if the church would only use them. The keys are found in the pattern of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus gave those keys to Peter and to the whole

church so that the whole world and this town might be unbound and set free; ^{that D's Kgdms might come... God's will be done on earth as well as in Heaven.}

Jesus said that he will build his church. The word *church* in the Greek New Testament is *ecclesia*. It means those whom Christ has called. ^{from every race + nation} The church is people Christ has called to serve him. Christ has called his church to be a sign of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. Christ has called the church to tell the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord. The living God has called the church to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of him as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples. Christ has called his church to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the

author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ.

If we don't heed Christ's call then we aren't really the church. ^{we think of the church as a kind of religious club} If we're just playing religious games with God, playing Church, ^{because there would be no foundation to support his church.} we should forget rebuilding. Jesus promised to build his church but he won't build it on sand or on shallow foundations and footers.

Jesus builds his church on a rock. Peter was a rock. Rather we should ^{Remember how} say that he became a rock. His faith wasn't always strong. He took his eyes off Jesus in the storm and began to seek. Peter also denied Jesus three ^{at the trial of Jesus} times but he repented. He became the foremost apostle. Tradition says that he became the first Bishop of Rome and that he was put to death on a cross like Jesus. Peter's faith grew strong. Peter came to have a rock like faith.

~~The church needs men and women like Peter with a rock like faith.~~ I often don't feel that my faith is very rock-like. Sometimes it feels more like quicksand and I feel like I'm sinking. Sometimes I deny Christ. But when we exercise our weak, doubting faith, our faith grows stronger. And I believe that my faith will become more solid and rock-like as I take risky steps of faith in obedience to Christ.

I believe our church will be rebuilt. Someday the steeple will be seen from miles around. I want you to image yourself with your arms and legs wrapped around it near the top. You're looking as far as you can see in all directions. You can see planes flying off to all corners of the world and you think of how the church is not just here in Oxford but around the world and you want to support your brothers and sisters in the faith around the world. ^{Up there you can see 10, 15, 20 miles away.} You ~~also~~ see all the new homes being built ~~as far as ten miles away~~ ^{& obey} and you wonder how many of those people really know Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Up there you can also see poverty, conflict within

families, pain, grief, loneliness and hardship and you know that Jesus has the key to those problems. And you want your church, along with the other churches in Oxford, to reach out to every family and person within sight of that steeple and share with them the Good News that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Many of us, perhaps, have the attitude, "I've got to see 4 million dollars in the bank before I'll believe we can build the church we need." Let me suggest that we learn to say, "I've got to *believe* it before I ever see it." If God is at work in us, God will give us the will and the power to achieve his purpose. We've got to believe it before we see it. We should ask not, "Can we afford it? Do we have the money?" That's the last question to be asked. The first question must be, "Who is this Jesus? Is Jesus really the Son of the living God? What has Christ called us as a church to be and do here in Oxford?"

Let us pray: Almighty Father, who inspired Simon Peter, first among the apostles, to confess Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God: Keep your Church steadfast upon the rock of this faith, so that in unity and peace we may proclaim the one truth and follow the one Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.