

Trinity 15 - 2018

Someone has said:

Architecture may express:

UTILITY in a skyscraper;

SERVICE in a bridge;

EFFICIENCY in a factory;

. . . but in a great House of Worship,

Architecture symbolizes Man's up-reach for God.

No doubt there is truth in these words. Architecture has power to inspire and, in some cases, change the course of one's life.

If I may speak personally, All Saints' Chapel at Sewanee -- which looks like a mini-National Cathedral -- may well have had something to do with where I am today, a Minister of the Gospel.

As a boy, on our summer holiday, my family and I would visit the Holy Mount (as the Sewanee Mountain is sometimes called).

The first thing I would do upon arrival was to go into All Saints' and look at the stained-glass windows, the arches, the carved raised pulpit and the gleaming white marble altar.

The building seemed to say: **“O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; let the whole earth stand in awe of him.”**

Solomon's Temple must have said something similar to the people of that day.

For sure, we know it was a place of Presence, and that Presence was very visible on the day its dedication.

We know this to be so because, before we picked up reading, the author tells us that a thick cloud so filled the house that the priest could not stand and perform their duties.

That cloud denoted Presence.

It was the same cloud that covered Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law.

It was the same cloud that led the children of Israel through the wilderness.

It was the same cloud that appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration in the New Testament.

And, it was into this same cloud Jesus went 40 days after his resurrection on the Day of Ascension.

Clouds in the Bible both reveal and conceal the glory and presence of Yahweh, and this glory and presence was very visible on the day of the Temple's dedication.

The Temple had a second function as well. Not only was it a place of Presence, it was the place where you went to have your sins dealt with, and the means by which was animal sacrifices

The number of oxen and sheep offered on the Day of Dedication alone is staggering. Verse 63 says: 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed that day.

Presence and Sacrifice for sin were both part of the function of the Temple. I will return to that thought in a few minutes.

Let's turn now to the prayer Solomon offered that day.

In this prayer, Solomon expresses some very profound insights into the nature and person of God, not the least of which is the bigness of God.

God is so big that no physical building -- no not even Solomon's great Temple -- can contain Him.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth?” Solomon asks, **“Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”**

Solomon’s insight was profound and correct. But, we get a surprise when we come to the New Testament.

The God who is too big to dwell in Solomon’s building is pleased to dwell in another type of ‘building’.

I am speaking of the mystery we celebrate at Christmas, the mystery of the Incarnation: God becoming Man in Jesus Christ . . . God inhabiting a human ‘house’.

John in his Prologue writes:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

And St. Paul says something similar in Colossians 2:9:

“For in him [in Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

Solomon’s Temple might be thought of as a shadow and anticipation of something better to come. ///

Let’s think about Christ. Remember what I said earlier about the Temple being a place of Presence. In chapter 21 of Revelation we read:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

What the seer saw happening at the end – with the coming of the new heavens and the new earth – has already begun with Jesus.

The place of dwelling is in the person of the Messiah.

Solomon’s Temple, again, was a foreshadowing of Christ.

But there is another parallel as well.

Remember what I said earlier about the Temple being the place where people went to have their sins dealt with?

What did Jesus do regularly throughout His earthly ministry? /// He forgave sins.

Is so doing, He was taking on Himself the chief function of the Temple.

And, of course, in the end, he completely subverts the worship of the Temple by becoming the Paschal lamb who dies once and for all for the sins of the people . . . thus ending the need for animal sacrifices.

It is hard to say how much of God's future Solomon understand on the day told about in today's Lectionary reading. We have no way of knowing how much God had revealed to him.

What is certain is that he knew in his bones that God was bigger than any physical building, however grand.

But, where is the Temple today? By Temple I mean the place where heaven and earth intersect, the place we can go and have the past dealt with, the place we can go and find peace with God?

Well, I have already told you. It is none other than Jesus Christ, and He is present with us this morning. If you burdened about anything: Come to Him. Come to Him.

But there in an important subscript I need to make here. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that Temple in Jesus has been expanded. It has been expanded to include Jesus' believing people.

You and I – if we have been united to Christ in faith and baptism – are the Temple of the Living God.

The same glory that was present in Solomon's Temple on the day of its dedication fills you.

That is why what we do with our bodies is important. Our bodies are Temples.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” we hear St. Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

All of which brings us to one final question: **Does the Temple in Jerusalem need to be rebuilt?**

Some Jews and some Christians think it does for God’s purposes to be accomplished. What do you think?

From what we have just seen, I would have to answer, no. That Temple has been replaced with something infinitely better: Jesus and His people.

In closing, if we really are a part of this Temple, how should we then live?

I would want to give a double answer to this question.

First, we should live as Agents of God’s presence in the world (remember the Holy Spirit dwells in you), and

Secondly, as Agents of God’s healing. We can’t heal but we can bring people to the One who can. The healing of which I am thinking is holistic. It includes body, soul, mind, families and whole communities. ///

Great edifices have their place. They serve as silent witnesses of the Gospel. But you and I are called to be living, breathing, speaking Temples.

And so I conclude with this challenge:

Remember who – or in this case ‘what’ -- you are: The Temple of the Living God.