

All Saints Sunday, 50th Anniversary of the Laying of the Cornerstone

Text: Exodus 25:1-9

¹The LORD said to Moses, ²“Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give. ³These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; ⁴blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ⁵ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; ⁶olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁷and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. ⁸“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.



Rev. Wallace C. Oswald dedicates the cornerstone

Theme: Was It Worth the Cost?

Today is a special day for our congregation. November 3 is the 50th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of our church. In those early years, our congregation grew at a rate that is almost impossible to grasp today. The congregation was formed in 1959 with 72 souls in all. By 1964 that number had grown to 1,132. The little chapel, which was our education building was no longer able hold all of those who were coming to worship. The new church was approved in January 1963 with the ground breaking taking place on May 19. The church was dedicated on February 9, 1964 with 1001 people in attendance.

It might seem to us that it must have been easy for the founders of our congregation, most of whom are now with the Lord in heaven. But the fact of the matter is that the building of this congregation and church took a lot of sacrifice. Today I would like to ask whether it was worth the cost.

I. Our founders built this congregation at a great cost.

Initially property had to be purchased, and the first building was built. The congregation chose a chapel/parsonage model that was also used at Divine Shepherd on the southwest side of Milwaukee. It was dedicated in 1960, but by 1961 the congregation had already outgrown the church. The congregation still owed \$90,00 for the land and chapel. The new church was going to cost another \$160,000, not counting the furnishing. One of the talking points that I read from the campaign asked, **“Isn’t this an impossible undertaking for a congregation like ours? The answer given was, “Admittedly it present by far the greatest challenge our congregation has ever faced but it is far from impossible. It calls for each of us doing his or her part, sacrificing and living for Christ.”** It would take the congregation until the 25th anniversary in 1984 to pay off the church. If you ask anyone who was around at the time whether it was easy, I am sure that they would respond that it wasn’t. In fact, because of the mortgage payments, this congregation had a lot of financial trouble, despite the large membership in those early years.

II. The founders thought that it was worth every penny.

I wish that I still had this brochure, but in the time capsule in the cornerstone, there is a brochure on the building project, that was sent to every member. We took it out for the 50th anniversary of the congregation. I've never seen another copy of it. It said that this building would be built so that our children and grandchildren will have a place to hear the word of God. Honestly, not many of the children and grandchildren of the people who paid to build this church are members. Most of them have moved to new places. They would have never guessed at that time that we would have Hmong and French African services in this place. But think of all of the people who have heard God's Word in this place for the last 50 years. Thousands of children have been in our Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. We have had 1,110 baptisms, 898 confirmations, 288 funerals, and 375 weddings in this place. We have our Bible classes, worship services, and even social ministry has taken place here. It seems as though I am always running into people who tell me that they were a member of Benediction at one time. It is because of the sacrifice of those who have gone before us, that we have a place to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ They thought that it was important to have a church in this place, and we are blessed because of it.

III. The offerings of God's people have always blessed those who have come after them.

In the text that I chose, Israel brought offerings to the Lord for the building of the tabernacle. This was a large tent in which Israel worshiped God. (Our own church has this tent-like structure in memory of the tabernacle.) This tent would serve God's people for 500 years until Solomon built the temple. Again people brought many gifts to build it. It lasted about 500 years until the Babylonians destroyed it. As soon as the Israelites returned from exile, they rebuilt the temple, and that structure lasted another 500 years until it was destroyed by the Romans. Each of those three worship structures were blessings to God's people then.

The offerings that God's people have given for the building of this church and many others have been sacrificial, but worth it because they knew the importance of a place where God's Word could be preached and His sacraments administered. We can all think of people who made sacrifices for us so that we could hear God's Word, parents who brought us to church and Sunday School or paid for a Christian education, someone who went out of their way to make sure that we could know Christ. It would have been easier to let us drift away from our Lord, but they sacrificed, so that we would know the love of Christ. We thank God for them.

IV. But the question for us is how important this is for us today?

Do we have the same burning desire that those in our neighborhood and our descendants will be able to worship our Lord? I am afraid that we are witnessing something monumental in our western culture. A culture that has been Christian for almost 2,000 years is abandoning the faith at an almost unbelievable pace. Every denomination is shrinking, even those that were growing not very long ago. Even Church members find worshipping our Lord inconvenient. Just a few years ago 33% of the members of a given church were in worship, today it's 20%, and by 2020 it is thought that only about 15% of church *members* will be in church on a Sunday morning. This week I heard that we have two problem with regard to new church workers. The first is that few students are going into church work today. The second is that those who graduate have a hard time finding a position. Ten

years ago, there was no such thing as an unemployed church worker. Today, we have hundreds of pastors, teachers, and other workers praying for positions.

If you walk through the university campus in Madison, and you will find huge campus ministries from every denomination, but today much of the buildings are being sublet to businesses because so few students come. Most of our building is rented by the University Book Store. The Presbyterian ministry near ours has a large Subway restaurant. Today our campus ministry in Madison has a modern, but a small campus ministry on the upper floor, and a great staff, but as far as the number of students who use it and our other campus ministries, it is a shell of what they once were.

The \$250,000 that this church was in debt in 1963 equates to almost \$2 million today. Would we be willing to sacrifice as much as our forefathers did to make sure that our children hear the good news of Christ as their Savior?

IV. We are blessed because of the sacrifice of our forefathers.

Why are we blessed? because as God says in our text, *“I will dwell among them.”* Just like the tabernacle this is the place where God has promised to meet with us. In confirmation class I define worship as “where God meets with His people.” Here we hear the blessed Gospel that Christ gave His life on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Here we receive His meal together. Here we are reborn into His family through Holy Baptism. Here we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the place where God strengthens our faith that Christ is our Savior, and we are the beloved children of God. Think of how blessed each one of us has been because of this place. It is a place that is dear to our hearts, because it is where we have come to know God’s love through our Savior Jesus Christ.

It is so fitting that the 50th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone happened to fall on All Saints’ Sunday. On this day we give God thanks for those Christians who have gone before us. At Benediction we have a lot to be thankful for. Think of some of those servants of our Lord in this place or whom you knew personally who sacrificed something, so that you could hear God’s Word. Was it worth the cost? When you know Christ as your Savior, you cannot help but be thankful for the sacrifices that others have made so that you could be a part of God’s people. May God also make each one of us ready and willing to sacrifice in our own way that those who will come after us and that those around us will continue to know Christ as their Savior too.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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The congregation processes to the new church.