

**Sermon for the Sanctuary Rededication, May 6, 2007:  
The More Things Change the More They Remain the Same**

1 Kings 9: 1-9

Ephesians 4: 1-6, 14-16

Matthew 16: 13-20

Some of you may have received the same bit of internet trivia that I have a few times in the past few weeks: At three minutes and four seconds after 2 AM on the 6th of May this year, the time and date will be 02:03:04 05/06/07. The e-mail adds, "This will never happen again." Well, it will, but not for a thousand years! It's funny to think about how the more things change (and a thousand years will bring a LOT of changes!), the more they also remain the same.

This sanctuary was first dedicated for use to the glory of God on July 20, 1865. Some things were different: the Reverend Doctor John Van Liew, who had also been pastor for the rebuilding of the church in 1838, when the second building needed to be replaced, a man of Dutch descent, was the pastor – now we have me, a female pastor who is not a Ph.D, who is NOT of Dutch descent. The interior of the sanctuary is somewhat different: the presence of the cross is perhaps the most noteworthy change. The pews in 1865 were straight, not arched, and there were short rows of pews on the two sides of the church; the aisles were much more narrow than now, and there were more rows. The King James translation was used in the service; now we use the New Revised Standard Version. The front areas where the two choirs sit were reserved for the elders and the deacons. There was no electricity; kerosene lamps, placed in a huge chandelier, supplied the light. There were no ceiling fans, and no organ. Some things are still the same: Dr. Van Liew and I both attended seminary; the service was in English then and is in English now; we are still governed by elders and deacons; and especially, the focus of the congregation both then and now is the same: to glorify God, and to reach out to those who are in need of the Good News about salvation offered to all through Jesus Christ.

What is good news? To Solomon, the good news was the renewal of the covenant, with the newly-constructed Temple in Jerusalem as the focus of that covenant. If Solomon was faithful to God, in the same way that his father, David, was faithful, then the covenant would continue to be affirmed by God. That covenant was centered on the continuity of the dynasty founded by David, as long as those descendants walked before the Lord as David had walked, and as long as those descendants observed the ordinances and statutes that God had established. Those things would serve as proof that the dynasty was glorifying God.

To Paul, the good news was the reuniting of all of humanity, both circumcised and uncircumcised, Jew and Gentile, into membership in the household of God, with Jesus as the cornerstone. Paul understood the new holy temple to be not a particular building in a particular place, but the spiritual dwelling place of God in the collective hearts of the believers. This was a change; the dwelling place of God changed from a physical location – Jerusalem – into the individual hearts of the believers who found their communion in Jesus; Jesus, who was the cornerstone of this new temple. And yet it was also the same: in following Jesus and living in communion with one another, the believers would glorify God.

We understand the Good News to be the grace that Jesus showed to His followers, with Peter as the example of that grace. Jesus named Peter as the rock on which the church was to be founded. That church would serve as a witness that God had glorified Jesus, and that Jesus had come for the purpose of glorifying God. Good old Peter was to be the rock. Good old Peter – who had his share of doubts, who argued with Jesus about Jesus' intent to go on to Jerusalem, where, He told the disciples, He would be arrested, tried, tortured, and crucified, before rising again. Peter argued with Jesus about that, and was soundly rebuked for it. Good old Peter – who Jesus knew would deny knowing Him to save his own skin. Good old Peter – to whom Jesus would appear after His resurrection. Good old Peter – who would lead the new church in glorifying God by glorifying Jesus Christ.

The more things change the more they stay the same.

We still have the promise of renewal, if WE are faithful.

We still have the promise of the reuniting of all of humanity, if WE are faithful. We still have the promise of reunion as the holy temple of the Lord, this particular household of the Lord's as one of many households of the Lord's, with Jesus as the cornerstone, if WE are faithful.

We still have the promise of grace when we fall, as Peter fell. We have the promise of forgiveness, and the promise of being used by God in the same way that God has used fallible types to do His will here on earth throughout the ages, His will here on earth, as it is in heaven. God does not ask us to be perfect. God is the perfect One in this equation. What God does require – what God tells us to do – is to be faithful, to glorify God and follow God, to not be distracted by the things of this world, but to walk in the presence of the Lord. Jesus told Peter to follow Him. We are to do the same today.

So as we prepare to rededicate this sanctuary to the glory of God, may we too remember that the more things change, the more they remain the same. May we too keep the main thing the main thing, the same main thing that our predecessors here at Readington have done for the past 142 years – may we continue to glorify God, and to reach out to those who are in need of the Good News about salvation offered to all through Jesus Christ. May this sanctuary, and may we, always be dedicated to such a purpose, until Jesus comes again. And even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

#### 1 Kings 9: 1-9

When Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. The Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you made before Me; I have consecrated this house that you have built, and put My name there forever; My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. As for you, if you will walk before Me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, 'There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.' "If you turn aside from following Me, you or your children, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. This house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, worshiping them and serving them; therefore the LORD has brought this disaster upon them.'"

#### Ephesians 4: 1-6, 14-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

#### Matthew 16: 13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in

heaven.” Then He sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah.

#### Traditional Version of the Apostles’ Creed

Anthem: All People That on Earth Do Dwell – Chancel Choir v. 1-4, congregation v. 5  
All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell, Come ye before Him and rejoice.

The Lord, ye know, is God indeed, without our aid He did us make;  
We are His folk, He doth us feed, and for His sheep He doth us take.

O enter then His gates with praise, approach with joy His courts unto;  
Praise, laud, and bless His name always, for it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good; His mercy is forever sure;  
His truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.

To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the God whom heaven and earth adore,  
From men and from the angel host be praise and glory ever more. Amen.

#### Prayer:

Dearly Beloved in the Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has in His grace brought to its consummation our work of preparing a house for His worship and the honor of His Name. Within these walls His Gospel is to be proclaimed once again, and His sacraments are to be celebrated. We are now gathered in His presence for the purpose of devoting again this church by a solemn act of worship to its proper and sacred use and of rededicating it to the honor of His most holy name. I ask You now to arise, and before the Lord to unite in this act of dedication.

Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three Persons in one God,

**To You we dedicate this house.**

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Father who is in heaven,

**To You we dedicate this house.**

Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, Head of the Body, which is the Church;  
Head over all things to the Church; Prophet, Priest, and King of Thy people,

**To You we dedicate this house.**

God the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son; given to be our abiding  
Teacher, Sanctifier, and Comforter; Lord and Giver of Life,

**To You we dedicate this house.**

The congregation may be seated.

*This is an addition; we didn’t talk specifically about what I would say about these folks;  
this is what I propose. Feedback?*

And now we would like to acknowledge all of those ordained clergy who have been affiliated with Readington Reformed Church, whether you have served as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, or as student pastors under care of classis. Please rise, and remain standing. (Pause) And now I'd like to ask all people who are descendants of ministers who have served the Readington Reformed Church to please stand. Some of those present include Frelinghuysens, Hardenburgs, Studdifords, Eelmans, and VandeGiessens. Are there any other descendants whose names I have neglected to mention? Let us praise God for these servants with our applause. You may be seated.

And now I would like Ken Iselin, most recently the vice president of consistory from 2004 through 2006, to come forward. *[Ken will call forward all of the folks who are mentioned by name on the plaque, introduce them again, with Dick Weger last; Ken will present the plaque to Dick. And Ken, since people will want to clap, it may be appropriate to repeat this: Let us praise God for these servants with our applause. You may be seated.] Ken – is this what you'd like to do? Modify as you see fit*

*Ken, how would you feel about leading us in this prayer? I'd like to give credit to Scotty Old for it in the bulletin, but you don't have to say his name here. And go ahead and bring us through the Lord's Prayer*  
Let us pray.

How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! Our souls long, yes, they faint, for Your courts, O Lord, our sun and our shield! From our hearts, our human flesh, we sing for joy to You, Loving God. How lovely is this dwelling place, where Your servants come year after year. As swallows returning to their nests, we keep coming back here, because here we have known Your presence. Gather us together in the name of Jesus, that we might be the church, as people chosen and set apart, that we might worship You in spirit and in truth. As this sanctuary has been renewed and restored, so renew us, that we might go from strength to strength in the service of Your glory. To You, O Father, be highest praise, and to the Son, all honor, and to the Spirit, continued blessing, One God forever more. Amen. (by Hughes Oliphant Old, for the rededication of Miller Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary, from Worship the Lord: The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America)

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: RIL #394 – The Church's One Foundation, v. 1-4

Benediction

Benediction Response: RIL #394 – The Church's One Foundation, v. 5