

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

July 17, 2022

Construction Zones

Rev. Louise Rogers

© 2022 by Rev. Louise Rogers and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: July 21, 2022

Yesterday we returned from vacation. My family had a wonderful time at the beach enjoying the shore with biking, golf, eating ice cream with much laughter and family time. A highlight was the first birthday party for our grandson Austin. While we were on a vacation enjoying rest and relaxation, there was one action we found everywhere we went, construction: road construction, building projects, home renovations. Apparently, this is the season to build something while the weather is good. For as long as people have walked the earth, they have built structures. Some structures get us from point A to point B. Other structures are designed for shelter or gathering places. Some buildings have a divine purpose built as a shrine to the heavens, to the glory of God. The Bible mentions divine building projects such as the pyramids, the mysterious tower of Babel, and the ultimate - Solomon's temple.

We don't talk much about the temple but in its day approximately 1,000 BCE, the temple was the center of all religious life because that was the place where the Israelites believed God lived. Because King Solomon built the temple to house God, he assembled the world's best architects to design a temple unlike any structure known. Work was begun with many of the Israelites laboring to complete the temple in just seven years. The temple was built in Jerusalem on a threshing floor, the place where years earlier David had built an altar to worship God. Solomon chose the location which would have the greatest significance. Finally, the day came for the temple dedication. The elders were assembled as were all the heads

of the tribes as the famed ark of the covenant was brought into the temple which would be its new, permanent home. There was much fanfare as the ark was brought forth and carefully placed in the temple.

King Solomon knelt down before the altar and prayed these words. He said,

“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant’s prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive.” **(1 Kings 8:23–24, 27-33)**

Following the prayer there was suspense as the people waited to see if God would indeed inhabit the newly built temple. Just as the priests began to leave, "a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." The people were concerned about whether or not God would approve of the new temple, but the answer was a resounding yes! It was an awesome experience. This was certainly a sight to behold. Solomon proclaimed before God and all the people, "I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever." Solomon built the temple and God sanctified it as a majestic place. For generations following the dedication, religious pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem to the temple for religious edification, instruction, worship, and blessings.

Over time, the majestic temple fell in disrepair. A second temple was built many years later and that temple too eventually was destroyed. Yet God's Holy Spirit that Solomon had beckoned and prayed to remains here on earth. In the fullness of time, Jesus came to earth, teaching that God's kingdom is to be built not by brick and mortar but through the Holy Spirit as a kingdom of love, acceptance, and grace where people live for God. It's amazing what transformation can occur when people gather together, and prayers are lifted up to God for a better world.

While the temple was ancient history, just last Sunday in Pittsburgh at Heinz field, a significant number of Christians came together who are committed to building God's kingdom

here in this city. Over 200 congregations came together to pray for the City of Pittsburgh and its leadership. Leaders from different professions education, politics, religion, community organizations, business and those working with children came together seeking a better world through faith. A community build on love, peace, and love. Together they prayed to God asking the spirit to bring about transformation as a way forward.

They also came together to celebrate the city's diversity by bringing together different denominations.

Light of Life Executive Director Jerrell Gilliam said they wanted to do it at Heinz Field because it is a place Pittsburghers take pride in. "In our society today, people are separating over every little difference that there is, and with that comes a lot of rancor," Gilliam said. "What we're saying now is that by coming together are actually stronger, so this is about a day of diverse churches, people of different backgrounds come together to say we love each other, and Pittsburgh is going to be more famous for God than for anything else." What a marvelous vision these leaders have for the city of Pittsburgh. We too can join with them in prayer for a beautiful city built for God.

We also know that the Holy Spirit is not just present in large significant gatherings. "Do you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Cor 13:16). When you got up this morning you may not have

realized that you are a temple of God, but God's spirit is in you! Our faith is not tied to a specific place but rather is a faith of transformation, and change. Changing ourselves into more and more of whom God is calling each of us to be and working as kingdom builders for the Lord. To make the world around us into a more hospitable place for all of God's creatures. What Jesus calls us to do is hard work as we know any construction requires hard work. As Richard Rohr summarizes for us, we are called "to share love, to spread joy, to wage peace, to foster patience, to nurture kindness, to exhibit generosity, to seek faithfulness, to cultivate gentleness, and to strive for better self-control." To accept our baptismal calling to become dead to sin and alive unto righteousness. To seek, by word and example, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly – following our God on the same path.

Building is hard but we will leave a world behind us a little better, a little kinder, and little safer. This can and will leave us stronger, more spiritually fit, and better able to cope with whatever lies ahead. Solomon asked if God would dwell on the earth? We can answer yes but not in the temple alone. God's kingdom is built when we are led by the spirit to love our neighbors, one person, one soul at a time. Amen.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org