

## INTRODUCTION

1. I find myself this morning once again returning to a Sermon Series I preached in the autumn of 2008. Indeed, the title of this message was one I employed on October 5 of that year, when I posed this question to our congregation:

"If you were asked to describe our church *as you wish it were*, and to do so with a single word, which word would you use?"

2. Can anyone remember my own answer? I'll provide a hint: the word I chose is defined by Dr. Webster as "something necessary, indispensable, of utmost importance."

The answer? I wish our church to be essential in the Kingdom of God.

And in so saying, dear friends, I wish nothing more than for this local congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ to be exactly what God's Word has declared His Church to be: necessary, of utmost importance, indispensible – in this world, in His Kingdom, and to His glory.

## LESSON

1. In defence of my chosen word, I direct your attention to the ecclesiology of the Apostle Paul:
  - a. in **1 Corinthians 3:9-16**, where he declares the Church to be "*God's building*", built on the foundation of Jesus Christ Himself;
  - b. in **1 Timothy 3:15**, when he reminds the young pastor of the church at Corinth that "*the Church of the living God*" is the "*pillar and bullwark of the truth*".
  - c. in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, where he describes those of whom Christ's church consists as "*fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*" who are growing into "*a holy temple* in the Lord", "*being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*".
2. This is no small thing, Beloved. These passages (and others, particularly **1 Peter 2:1-12**) proclaim boldly that the Church – Christianity itself, if you will – is *more* than a "world view", *more* than just a particular notion of yet another religious philosophy in the vast, prickly pantheon of the religions of the world, and certainly more than what even some of us might think it to be: a tightly-knit, closed-end gathering of like-minded Christian folk.

No indeed, Dear Friends: the Church is a singular, *essential culture*, one consecrated by God as **the place of His presence** in the world. We sometimes forget this, and it surely grieves the Holy Spirit.

## LESSONS

1. But if we do remember, the Church of the Saviour can become, with the help of God and in the power of His Holy Spirit, an **essential** Church in, around, and beyond Rohrerstown. That is my most fervent wish for COS, and it fuels the passion of my prayers for this physical re-location of this congregation.
2. Already we are planning for the physical restoration and modernization of “The Rohrerstown Chapel”, but the **light** of God’s presence there will shine forth from that fine old building only if we prayerfully undertake the four primary **stewardship responsibilities** assigned by Him to each and every congregation of Christ’s Church, no matter where they meet:
  - a. **prophetic** responsibilities: **preaching** and **teaching** -- bringing God’s Word to His people;
  - b. **priestly** responsibilities:
    - (1) bringing suitable sacrifices to God in **worship**,
    - (2) interceding with God through **prayer** on behalf of one another;
    - (3) ministering the **sacraments** of **Holy Communion** and **Baptism** ;
  - c. **fellowship** responsibilities: loving and serving one another in deliberate **community**, one established, defined, and directed by the principles of the Kingdom of God as are revealed in Scripture – principles so radically different from those of world in which we are to live as “*sojourners and exiles*”, members of “*a holy nation*”, not quite at home here;
  - d. **missional** responsibilities: proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in **word** and **deed**;
    - (1) sharing the message of God’s **salvation** in Christ Jesus,
    - (2) seeking **justice** for the oppressed by whatever means made available to us,
    - (3) exercising the ministries of **mercy** and **grace** in acts of kindness and generosity, and

(4) **loving** others – even those with whom we disagree, **even our enemies** -- with the love of Christ, “*because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us*” (**Romans 5:5** ESV).

3. This is the essential work to which we are called by our Lord. It is same essential work to which we have been called these fifteen years, and we must confess – some, if not all, of us – that we have not always been as faithful as we should in our calling.
4. Ah, but God still love us! *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, ever ready to re-establish His covenant with us and re-energize His presence with us.* That, Beloved, is the essence of divine **mercy**.

And He has given us this great gift of a new building, a new venue for the work assigned to this little congregation of His holy Church. That, Dear Friends, is a gesture of divine **grace**. Hallelujah!

5. As we gather at the Table of the Lord this morning, let us confess our collective failures of inconsistency, indifference and disobedience. Let us repent of them, to the glory of God.

As we are ministered the Communion of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Great Mystery of His presence in the bread and wine this morning let us thank God for His faithfulness and re-dedicate this church:

- a. to the **lordship** of Jesus Christ over the life of every member,
- b. to the **fellowship** of **authentic community** and love for one another,
- c. to the **anointing** and **enabling power** of the **Holy Spirit** in all our ministries and in all our **relationships**, and
- d. to the difficult, exciting, challenging, fulfilling work to which awaits us in Rohrsersville. It’s sure to be equal parts inconvenient, frustrating, delightful, and inconsistent, yet, I truly believe, altogether wonderful.

*Soli Dei Gloria. Amen.*