

VISION SUNDAY

Sermon Growth Guide

August 14, 2022

A Place to Pray

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2 Chronicles 6:12-21

Key Verse: 2 Chronicles 6:21 “Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive.”

Big Idea: The Church is not a building. It is a people who worship in a place where they are gathered and from which they are sent into the world as the people of God.

Foundations

This Vision Sunday we celebrate what God has given us and what He has called us to be and do as we reflect on Solomon’s Prayer for the Temple. This was a significant and celebratory time for the Temple. It meant that God had kept a promise. It symbolized the place where one went to meet God. God, however, was not limited to the Temple but it was considered a place where heaven and earth met...where God’s people—together—could worship the God who was with them. But what does this ancient Temple have to do with us? Well, it causes us to ask: What is the church?

Many of us may remember the song from Avery and Marsh that was popular about 40 years ago: The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is the people. Pastor Tim makes this very clear in his sermon when he says, “... you are the Temple of God ... there is power in coming together ... in a place to pray and be renewed in our mission.”

Our building is a place where we gather to praise and pray to a great God. Together, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are built up in the faith as we go into the world with the love of Jesus.

Understanding God’s Word

Together read 2 Chronicles 6:12-21.

Solomon is not acting as a priest when he prays. His prayer is the representative prayer of all the people. Go through this text carefully and describe all the things that Solomon prays for. Where do you find those kinds of prayer in our corporate worship?

Applying God’s Word

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Solomon’s prayer is all about God’s presence with His people. The Apostle Paul defines this presence for followers of Jesus. In what specific ways does the presence of God’s Spirit dwelling in us shape our life together?

Witnessing God’s Word

If God’s Temple represents the place where God and humans meet, and if God’s people are now that place, what works of the Spirit within us will enable people to meet Jesus where we gather, work and play?

A church is not a building. A church is a people. One of the great tragedies is the transition of the word used in the Bible, *ekklesia*, to the word we use, “church.” Why? *Ekklesia* means, literally, “the called out.” Imagine a caller walking down the middle of the street calling everyone out to join him. The ones who come out are the “called out” ones, the *ekklesia*. That’s a people on a mission. That’s a movement headed somewhere together. *Ekklesia* got translated into the German, *Kirche*, a house or a building, or a temple—the Lord’s house. English adopted the word church. A building. But church is not a building. Church is a people on mission. Still, that people needs a building. Thank God, we have one.

If you are going to get called, where are you called from? If you are going to get sent, where are you sent from? If you are missionized, missionary, you are called and sent. You have to be somewhere to hear that call. You have to stand somewhere to step off into your “sent-ness” into the world. The church isn’t a building, it is a people. And those people designate a building, a gathering place, a place to pray. Today we celebrate the completion of a significant upgrade to our Sanctuary. This place to pray was built in 1959. Dr. Howard Hansen preached a sermon on March 22, 1959, to dedicate the sanctuary. The passage was 1 Kings 8:22-30. “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven.” (1 Kings 8:22) Solomon’s prayer of dedication of the Temple. Yes. Today we read the same from Chronicles. Hansen’s sermon was titled “Commencement Day.” He said, we’re not done, First Pres, we are just beginning. Today we start; we commence. Here are his words: “So would God speak to us in this hour, saying, ‘You have completed a great building project. You now have a church structure which ought to be your pride and joy. You have a place of worship in which the Spirit of God will be manifest. You have a better instrument with which to serve me. What now are you going to do with it? How are you going to use it?’ We have not prayed, and labored, and

sacrificed just to produce a new building in Colorado Springs, nor to improve this corner. We have erected this building to provide an instrument in the service of God.”

In another sermon, Dr. Hansen outlined the details of all the features, the inspirational stained-glass windows, the brick, and stone and the woodwork—grapevines to remind us of John 15, that we abide in the vine to produce fruit—and the strong façade facing the heart of downtown. He was particularly proud of the modern, ornate, 1959 light fixtures....Those we tossed. But here we have our space, our updated place to pray. We do not dedicate this space in the same way Solomon dedicated the Temple. Now, in Christ, the presence of God is within every believer and we, the people, are the Temple of the Lord. But, as Dr. Hansen preached in 1959, we have to worship somewhere: “While the existence of God cannot be localized in the sense that He can be limited to one place, the experience of God must be localized, or else we do not experience it at all, because we are localized. The infinite must be brought into the range of the finite. As a human being, I am here or there, or some other place, and if I am to meet God, or experience God, and the benefits that can come through the worship of God, then it must be where I am....If God is not worshipped somewhere, He is not worshipped anywhere.” It is right to designate a space like this, a place to pray.

We took the 150th Year to issue a challenge. Let’s renew our Sanctuary. The heart of everything we do and are as a church is worship. It’s our first value in The First Pres Way: “Live for God. Worship trains our hearts to beat for God. Do you worship with passion and joy every week?” We have, since 2017, a fresh Worship Center in the heart of downtown to match every bit of what you find out in the suburbs (although it’s a bit cramped at times). Let’s update our 1959 Sanctuary. We needed an updated Sanctuary that invites people to walk into our long-proven worship style, but today—it doesn’t invite you to walk into the past, but to experience this style of worship with fresh relevance. We need

people to walk into the future when they walk into our Sanctuary. We did it. A year ago, I said, "This isn't a pledged campaign. Just give what you'd like to celebrate our church at 150 years." We gave and we covered the renovation of the Sanctuary. We didn't miss a single Sunday of worship (although we had some interesting construction Sundays!). And here it is! Today we celebrate and dedicate it all to the glory of God.

Solomon stretched out his hands before the Lord and prayed, he appealed to the Lord, "Please meet us here." The people of God had been traveling with the Ark of the Covenant to represent the presence of God. Since the moment they saw the fires of God on the top of Mt. Sinai, the Ark, with the tablets of Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's almond blossomed staff inside, conveyed God's presence. The Temple was a permanent place to house the Ark and to perform the sacrifices, rituals and prayers meant to keep the people tied to God and God tied to the people. "Please hear us," asked Solomon. "May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place." (2 Chronicles 6:20)

Solomon dedicated the Temple with a mighty plea: God, please hear us when we gather here to pray. Forgive our sins. Renew our hope. Rescue us from evil and plague. Make a home for the homeless. Welcome the alien and exile. Father the fatherless. Heal the afflicted. Afflict the comfortable with conviction to change. Be, in this place, a heartbeat of your Kingdom pulsing through our lives and our city. The long prayer outlines seven different instances in which we need the Lord to hear and intervene, when promises are made, when we are defeated by enemies, in drought, in plague, for aliens in exile, in times of war and in times of captivity. We need God still, don't we? But we know, the church is not a building, but a people. Now, in Jesus, we have become the Temple of God. The presence of the Lord is with every believer as the Holy Spirit resides in us. As Paul wrote to

the church in Corinth: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) Yes, you are the Temple of God! And there is power in us coming together. We can gather in any place, but we set this place aside with resolve to be together regularly to seek the Lord, glorify God in worship, deepen our discipleship, celebrate our fellowship, be renewed in mission, and feel the power of God launching us back out into a broken, darkened and needful world. It is Vision Sunday, and we dedicate this Sanctuary to God—and the Worship Center—but not as a holy talisman. As a place to pray and be renewed in our mission.

There are great challenges before us, church. Yesterday, I outlined a few of them. I feel like I've said this a lot, but we are emerging from a Global Pandemic. The church is hurting. Not just our church, but the church. People are not coming back. Pastors are giving up. Churches are closing at alarming rates. At the same time, suicide is up, anxiety is up, depression is up, addictions to drugs, alcohol abuse, pornography and domestic violence are all up. Life together has taken a hit. Do you believe in the mission of the local church? Do you believe that we, the people of God in our time, in our city, have a responsibility and a mission? There are a lot of good ministries, government programs, a lot of good causes, a lot of good efforts to get behind in our city, but none of them can do what the Lord does through a healthy, local church.

We have a mission, First Pres. We are called by God to reflect the love of Jesus and be Light + Life for the City. The light of Christ shines through us as we keep our eyes focused on Him. The life of Christ flows through us as we abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine. In a post-Christian world where the church is seen at best as irrelevant and at worst as a hindrance to progress, we drive a city-positive mission. We are "for the City," proving that we care

about the needs and the broken places, and we sacrifice ourselves for the human flourishing of every citizen. Do you know that's how the early church turned Rome around? Rome tore down the pantheon. They dropped every false god! Mostly because followers of Christ demonstrated care and compassion, sacrifice and investment in the needs around them. The love gave avenue for the truth. The goodness gave avenue for the beauty of the heart of Jesus to show up. Yes, we have a mission.

Today, I call you to a greater commitment. We can't coast along, expecting the push of the past to propel us through the waves and storms of today. It's lean in time. Yes, we stand on the shoulders of giants. None of us were there when this church started, for the first worship service on August 17, 1872, or when the Bible first opened in the hands of Henry Gage for the first sermon, the first baptism, the first conversion. We weren't there. But God has us here now. Here we sit 150 years later, and even though we were not there then, we are here now, and it is our job, our privilege and our responsibility to carry on! We celebrate 150 years of God's faithfulness, and we say the past is prelude. Carry on! First Pres is not a building downtown; it is a people devoted to Jesus.

Solomon prayed for seven answers from God. I want to lay before you seven challenges for the mission of First Pres in 2022 and 2023. Don't worry. I'll do it quickly, okay?

1. Worship: We need to fill these empty seats in worship on Sundays. Church attendance around the world has slumped. I've seen numbers at 50% celebrated in other churches, meaning 50% of pre-COVID attendance. As of June, we were 74% back in the Sanctuary and 62% back in the Worship Center. It's been 2.5 years! We need to fill those seats again. Church at home is not really church. You don't grow the same. Kids are left behind. We have children who after two years think church is a channel that gets turned on, a show to watch on Sunday mornings. Many continue to struggle with medical

threats, and I know that. The rest of us need to get back into healthy patterns and get to inviting others. Getting people into church is not the end goal of the kingdom of God, but I tell you what, leaving them out on the streets isn't either.

2. Discipleship: We need confidence in making disciples. COVID threw us for a loop, sure, but it's time to get back into classes, get back into Bible Studies, get back into Men's Groups, Women's Groups, and Life Groups. The command is to make disciples. Jump in. Find your class. Find a space to "breathe in" to have healthy input for your own growth in discipleship. Get into a Life Group where you are known by name, prayed for meaningfully, trusting the Word of God from one another, and living the Christian life together.

3. Serve: This is the simple rhythm. Worship. Breathe in. Breathe out. Find your input, find your output. We grow so much in commitment to service. Friendship grows. Knowledge grows. We need to activate our gifts for Jesus. Find something to build into and serve.

4. Reaching the Next Generation: We need to make a promise and keep a promise: First Pres is a great place to raise kids in the Lord. I'm tired of this youth culture pushing kids into depression, anxiety and suicide. I'm tired of watching parents pulling their hair out trying to keep their kids on steady ground in Jesus. We need to make a promise and keep a promise. First Pres is a great place to raise kids in the Lord. It's time to lean in on VBS, Kids Min, Nursery, Preschools, Youth Ministry...participate in the renovation of the Weber Student Center or the Third Floor. Become a teacher. We need you. We are launching a new Sunday schedule; all Christian Ed is from 9:45 - 10:45 a.m.. Families have had a very hard time navigating Sunday mornings. I've seen families leave in tears because they were late to everything they tried to do. We had to make a change and make it easier on families. We are doing that. Please support it in every way.

5. Evangelize: This is not a world ready to receive Jesus on the basis of a nice worship service alone. We need to enter into meaningful missionary engagement with Colorado Springs. We need to renew our commitment to evangelism.

6. Give: I'm being honest here, we are a little stretched. Many of us have given special gifts for capital projects this year. We have also been able to use some unexpected resources from wills and estates of dear members who passed away. But general giving is down. COVID did not hurt our giving, apart from a cashflow crisis early on. The downturn in the market has hurt our giving. We can't use designated funds or wills/estates to pay our payroll, and with inflation and the cost of living rising, we want to keep up and care for our staff. Invest regularly in the work of the Lord as your act of discipleship and devotion.

7. Pray: We need to be a praying church. Prayer isn't an add-on alongside the work of ministry; prayer is the work of ministry. Prayer is the fuel of the church. The reason I wanted to study the Lord's Prayer is that we need to get deeper

and more serious about prayer in this church. We need to be in constant prayer for this ministry, and others, but for this ministry right here. Do you pray for First Pres? Our staff? Our preaching? Our ministries?

These seven challenges, they are not exactly lined up with our First Pres Way: 7 Values in Our Pursuit of Jesus, but they are close. If we lean in, what will we see God do? This is a season. This is an opportunity. We are rededicated, not these walls and bricks and pews and wood....WE are rededicated. There is a mission right here for Jesus. People of God, what do you want to see God do? What do you want to see God do right here? Pray. Devote yourself. Lean in. God is on the move in us. Will God meet with us? Will God commune with us? Will God hear us when we pray? Jesus said, tear down this temple and I will build it again in three days. The people said, it took us 46 years to build it! Three days?! But the temple he referred to was his body. Jesus is our meeting place; Jesus is our temple. We are His. He is ours. A place to pray.