

## UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE

Matthew 7:24-27  
Psalm 127

Faith Community  
October 7, 2007

### Introduction

Today we celebrate thirty years of faith. This is a landmark in our history; a milestone. We look back and remember powerful experiences, funny moments, sad times of loss, and celebrations of new life and changing life. We have a lot to celebrate.

It is impossible to calculate the number of lives that have been changed, and people who have been touched because of Faith Community.

Through thirty years of our life together we have been faithful. We understand that we were created and exist to serve God. Our scripture today is Psalm 127, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." That is the same scripture and sermon title that was used at the first worship service.

We have remembered experiences from our past over these last ten months of celebration. But this anniversary is really for the future. We look back at the road we've taken to help us on the road ahead. We check the route we've traveled to make sure we haven't gotten lost, so that we know our path into the future is the right one. We look forward to the years ahead with excitement.

### I

The center of our life has been these worship services. Without this time worshipping God, we would be a body without a heart. This is where we all come together. Various other groups and individuals serve God in different ways, but here we all worship together. This is our most important time.

Our cumulative total attendance for a year is about 7,500. In thirty years that means attendance of well over 200,000. These are people who came to sing, pray, confess, find healing, and explore God's word. They come to worship God. Our worship includes moments of celebration and joy, as well as times of poignancy and sorrow; I've seen men and women with tears in their eyes because something has touched them deeply.

We've had some funny moments – no one who was there will ever forget one of our children's messages. A woman and her daughter came forward, laid down a hard board on the chancel, set up a boom box and proceeded to tap dance to "New York, New York." Did I mention they were both wearing pink tutus?

Ironically, that same Sunday a pulpit committee came from another church. They were considering me as they searched for a new pastor.

I got a call from a member of that committee later that Sunday evening saying they weren't considering me any longer. I wanted to say, "Wait, that's never happened before! Our church isn't like that. That was a weird fluke! Honest." But I just smiled and said, "I understand. Thank you for calling." God works in mysterious ways.

Speaking of that, when John Wortman, a charter member of this church, was painting the church charter he came to the end of this line and made a bad mistake. Then he made it worse by trying to clean it up. The ink smeared. Now he had a mess and he didn't know what to do. Then he thought about the wording that went there – “Our Lord Jesus Christ.” He painted over the blotched part with gold, so that what stands out in this line is, “Our Lord Jesus Christ” – the heart of what we are about. The center of our life together is worshipping God and hearing God's word.

## II

We continue to grow in our faith. Whether it is a child in Church School or a student in one of the youth groups; whether it is an adult in Kerygma or a fourth grader in LOGOS, we are all exploring what our faith means in our everyday lives. Through these experiences we learn about and apply our faith. Our faith grows deeper. We trust more. In that process we are becoming disciples.

We don't just learn faith like we might learn calculus; we grow deeper in our beliefs and especially in our trust. It's a process that goes from the beginning to the end of our lives: a rose is placed on the communion table marking the birth of a child into our church family; a few months later that child is baptized right here among us and in a few years that child celebrates his first communion. After a few more years he will be confirmed as a member of Faith Community; then in no time he is honored here on his graduation from High School and is sent off to the next phase of his life with a prayer scarf. One day he stands right here to get married; then a few years later he brings his child. Several years later he will stand during the prayers and celebrate his anniversary. Finally, one day, people will gather here to say good-bye.

What other place supports you from your birth to your death? What other place walks with you in faith from the day you are born until you are welcomed home? This church family is about growing in faith all through our lives. It's about trusting in God word.

## III

One thing that we have been very clear about is that we are not just here to serve ourselves. You can't be a Christian church and spend all your money on yourself. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are clear that God is passionately concerned about people who are suffering. In fact, in Matthew Jesus says, “Whatever we have done to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done to me.” And maybe more importantly, “Whatever you have not done for one of the least of these, you have not done for me.” Jesus absolutely identifies with the struggling, the poor, the oppressed, those who are used, and the suffering.

As you well know, before we began as a church, we set a policy – Policy #1 – which says that we will give 20% of our operating fund for missions outside our church. *We have done that consistently for thirty years.* The total that we have given in our thirty year history is \$916,073 – just short of \$1 million!

But living our faith isn't just dispensing money. We have made a concerted effort to give ourselves as well as our money. We are involved with a soup kitchen in Detroit, the Novi Emergency Food Program, blood drives, Novi Youth Assistance, Stephen Ministries, as well as

local and international mission trips. We have gone to South Dakota, Northern Michigan, Ohio, and the senior highs go each year to the Pittsburgh Project. We helped rebuild homes after the hurricane in St. Maarten, built beds for a women's shelter, and offered medical help in Honduras. We've done mission trips to Brazil and Poland. We are planning a construction and medical mission to Guatemala next February.

When we were preparing to return from our first trip to Honduras, one of the high school students said, "There is no way I will ever be able to explain to my friends what this experience has been." We always return with the clear understanding that in giving we have received far more than we gave. For thirty years we have tried to act on our faith.

#### **IV**

We can't keep our faith to ourselves. Can you imagine a new father trying to keep secret that his wife's had a baby? When we have good news, we have to tell other people. We can't help ourselves.

The good news of the gospel and the good news of our church family are meant to be spread. Don't be afraid to say to a neighbor or friend, "My church means a lot to me, I'd love to have you come with me sometime." It's not fair to keep good news to yourself – spread the word! We believe in sharing God's word.

#### **Conclusion**

Today we celebrate our faithful ministry for thirty years - and we look forward to the next thirty. We have become what our mission statement said we would try to be: people who hear God's word, trust in God's word, act on God's word, and share God's word.

So we don't celebrate that we have survived for thirty years as an institution; we celebrate what has happened in our lives and in the lives of others. Because of Faith Community we have worshipped together, we have put down deep roots of faith, we are more compassionate people, and we continue to serve God with our lives. In short, we have grown as disciples of Jesus.

As we look to the future we explore how we can serve God more effectively and reach out to more people with this good news.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." All that we do is built on the foundation given to us by God.

Amen