

Scripture: Ezra 3:7-13  
Message: Shouting, Weeping, Building  
November 19, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON  
Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

I stand here this morning with excited, nervous anticipation. I am certain that God is at work in this church. That is evident in the lives of people here in the church who serve each other within the church, as well as serve our community in different ways.

There is a wonderful history of God at work in this church over the last 67, almost 68 years. There have been worship services, Bible studies, people coming to faith, serving, caring, helping, so many stories are part of this church.

I guess that's why I am excited. God has been at work. God is at work. This is God's church.

But I'm a bit nervous because something is changing. The church, as we have known it, is not going to be the same.



I've chosen to illustrate this with this set of building blocks. The church. Familiar. Easy to identify as a church. Typical. Normal. Choose your adjective for something that we are used to seeing. This can bring to mind many memories of wonderful things that God has been doing.

For the people of Israel, it was all about the temple. Solomon's temple. A glorious, central place of worship. Majestic. Stately. It spoke of God and greatness and all that was holy and good.

It was devastating when that temple was destroyed. All that was familiar and good and central to their faith was shattered. It's hard to imagine the church being pushed over. It's hard to imagine all that is familiar being knocked over. Where do we find stability for our faith? Where do we find a place to live out our faith? Where do we find meaning and hope?



For one thing, God says that it's not in the building. Nor is it in the things that happen in the building. God must be central in our lives. Our trust is in God alone, not in the church. Israel lost that central focus on God and worshiped other gods. Israel put their trust in the ceremonies in the temple, rather than in the God whom they were to worship. For their punishment, they were sent to a foreign land and the temple was destroyed.

When we come to this story in Ezra, they are rebuilding the temple. They have come back

from exile and are returning to the true worship of God. There are details in the telling of the story that draw us back to a former time.

The Israelites who were in exile have been granted permission to return. As they come back to the promised land, they renew their relationship with their God who has blessed them with freedom. The first thing they do is build an altar and offer sacrifices. An important next step is to rebuild the temple, the place of worship, the symbol of God dwelling among his people.

The telling of the story of this rebuilding of the temple draws us back to the temple of Solomon. See the parallels:

Ezra 3:7, They gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa.	1 Kings 5:10-11, Hiram, king of Tyre, kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and pine logs he wanted, and Solomon gave Hiram wheat as food and pressed olive oil.
Ezra 3:8, In the second month...they began the work	1 Kings 6:1, in the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.
Ezra 3:10, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD.	2 Chronicles 5:12, All the Levites who were musicians— Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres, accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.
Ezra 3:11, With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever."	2 Chronicles 5:13, The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD, and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever."

It is no wonder that some of the exiles remember the days of long ago, when the people



worshipped at a glorious temple of grandeur and gold. It is no wonder that some of the older people remember the stories they heard of what Solomon's temple was like, the one that was destroyed. What these exiles were doing was not building something new. They were rebuilding the dwelling of God, the symbol of God's

presence.

However, the structure they were putting up was nothing like what it had been. And so we get a new element in the story, that has no parallel in the past.



When Solomon built his temple, there was only celebration and joy and cheers. There was praise and singing to God.

As the exiles build, there is joy and celebration and cheers and praise. But there are also tears and crying.

The foundation was just laid, and the people paused for a time of worship. They were back home, building a house for God. It was good to celebrate the blessings of God on his people.

There were shouts of praise. This was not the kind of worship where everyone is sitting in a pew and waiting for the organ to begin. This is cheers and shouting and glory given to God by an excited people.

However, some of the people were not so excited. This temple was nothing like what it used to be. They were crying. This too was not the polite sniffle into a kleenex. This was the crying and wailing of terrible sadness.

Shouting. Weeping. Building.

We can look at the present, but it doesn't seem as good as what we once remembered. The church is not as full as it used to be. People don't read their Bibles like they used to. People don't know their doctrines like they used to. People don't make serving the Lord in the church a priority like they used to. People don't appreciate good music like they used to. We don't have a choir like we used to. We don't have a second worship service like we used to. The minister or the elders don't visit like they used to. It's just not as good as it used to be. The church is a crumbling mess.

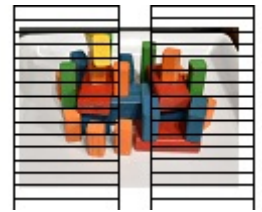
Others look at the present and say, isn't it great that there is a spiritual hunger in our world. It's so good to see people of different ethnic backgrounds in the church. It's so good to have different expressions of music and use of the screen for singing. It's so good to have different organizations and ministries where we can learn and serve, not just the church. It's great to have a Community College right on our doorstep. It's so good to have different places for fellowship with people from different churches and backgrounds.

Sunday a.m. worship	Chalice
Sunday pm/wednesday	CFVS
Kid's Church	Committee
Worship Committee	Ministry
Trades Commission	Ministry
Men's Bible Study	Ministry
Seniors Bible Study	Ministry
Worship Ministry	Ministry
Prophets' Circle	Ministry
Trades	Ministry
Deacons	Ministry
Prophets' Circle	Ministry
Sunday Kids Church	Ministry
Church video	Ministry
Prayer Ministry	Ministry
	Video Projection

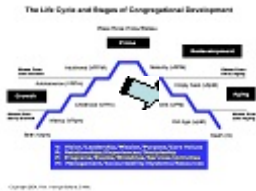
That is what brings me to a place of excited, nervous anticipation. What we once knew as the church is no longer. Nor can we go back there. Life and culture have changed and the expression of that unchanging faith we have in God adjusts to these changing times. We are thankful for the faith of our fathers and mothers and for the stories of

faith that are part of who we are today. We are thankful for God's faithful blessings to his church in the past.

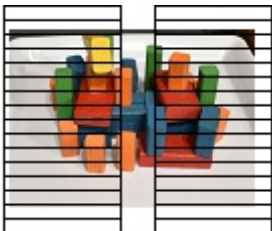
And we live with anticipation of what will be. I don't know exactly what the church will look like. But it's going to be different.



Three years ago we had a workshop in our church that looked at our Church Life Cycle. We clearly identified our church in a place of retirement and aging. Programs and Management of those programs has the priority. The option is to continue in a direction of decline, or to enter a time of renewal, where Relationships and Vision have the priority. Council has been doing some work at this over the last 3 years or so, but it's time to get more specific.



This coming Thursday we are having a congregational meeting where Sheila Murphy is going to lead us in talking about some shifts that need to be made. How will we as a church build God's church on his foundation? What will this renewed church look like? What ministries that have been part of church life in the past will not be part of the future? There will be some weeping and tears.



What new opportunities will we step into, with thankfulness that God is leading us into these new places? That will be reason for shouts of joy and praise.

Whatever we come up with, and it won't happen at once or in one meeting, it is God's church. We trust in his leading. He is continuing to write his story in the life of Bethel CRC. We are part of God's ongoing Grand Story.

Which brings me back to standing here this morning with excited, nervous anticipation. God is at work, building his church. God welcomes us as partners in his building project. That's exciting.

But it also means moving to a new expression of what his church will look like. That makes me nervous. For one thing, not knowing exactly what it will look like is a bit scary. For another, knowing how difficult it is to let go of what is near and dear to our hearts makes me nervous, even sad.

But knowing it is God's work fills me with anticipation. It's not about what I want; this is not about Pastor Jack's agenda or my legacy. Nor is it about what you prefer. It's God's church. Go

ahead and cry in letting go. Go ahead and shout for joy in his leading and blessing.

Let us commit to being faithful to God in following his leading, as we continue building his church.

With praise and thanksgiving, in our weeping and shouting and building, we say of the LORD, "He is good; his love endures forever."

Amen.

With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD:	They joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the LORD, and sang:
"He is good; his love endures forever."	"He is good; his love endures forever."