

A Meeting Place with God

(The Past & Future Mission of the BEFC)
November 27, 2016



There's a Christian camp near Upsala, MN called Camp Lebanon. Their motto is that they are "A meeting place with God." That's a great motto! This church building that we are sitting in is just a building; it's just a tool for ministry. And yet, it's also so much more, because it's a place that was built and designed and dedicated to be a meeting place with God. That's why it sits here on the corner of Carr Lake Rd and Washington Av. this morning.

There are times in all of our lives when it is very valuable to look back and learn from our past. There are also times in our lives when there is great value in looking forward and planning for what's next. Today, in our church's life, we are going to be doing both of those things. In my quiet time this week, I was captured by 1 Timothy 1:18. Paul writes, "Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well." Paul knew that simply reminding Timothy of his past calling to ministry, would revitalize his current mission for the gospel.

One of the ways that our church can be reminded of our past calling to ministry is to consider some of the various ministry spaces where we have worshipped together and grown spiritually over the years. Our physical gathering space as a church body goes back at least 92 years, as far as 1924. That's when we gathered at the old Carr Lake School. It's now referred to as the Old School House. It's located about ¾ of a mile west of here on Carr Lake Road. The closest thing that I could find to an old picture of that building is from a Carr Lake VBS.¹ I'm guessing that there is no one here today, who gathered in this particular worship space? But, a generation of Christ-followers before us, did. Those who've gone before us were faithful back in those days. That can inspire us to want to be faithful now, so that we can continue this ongoing heritage of faith for those who follow us.



In 1952, our 1st official church building was completed. It was called the Carr Lake Bible Chapel. I found an old picture of it. Perhaps there is someone here this morning who has been in this worship space? I invite you to please stand if you were. This building was converted into a house. It's located in the same spot: 825 Chapel Lane. It's now the home of Ivan and Elaine Lauderbaugh.



In 1976, we constructed our 2nd church building. It used to be located at the present site of The Gym Bin, which is only about ½ mile north of where we are today but it's on the east side of Washington Av. That building was then moved to the north end of the property and placed over a new basement foundation.² There must be a few people here today who worshipped in that space?

¹ About 1936.

² The 1976 60' x 100' foundation currently sits under the building next to the Gym Bin with the domed roof. In 1982 the building was placed over a new wood foundation on the north end of the church property.

In 1989 we constructed our “New Building” on the corner of Carr Lake Rd. & Washington Av. That is where our church is currently. This building met our needs for a long time. You may remember the inside looking a little different. Those blue chairs you see are actually sitting in our Youth Room right now. And that back wall behind section 3 was originally designed to be movable, so that we could open it up to the Fellowship Hall



when needed.

Many of us remember a while back when we added on our massive Community Life Center. Our building used to end at our Fellowship Hall. But we expanded. Any guess what year that was? We completed the Community Life Center in 2006. In fact, Tuesday, November 29, 2016 marks our 10-year anniversary of doing ministry in that space. Can you believe it's already been 10 years since we completed that project?



Our family came here in 2000, so the Community Life Center was the first major building project that we were part of. My family will tell you that I get pretty nostalgic once in a while. I find it helpful to reflect on where I've been; sometimes even visiting old places where I used to live. It's fascinating to me, to see how things have changed, and how I've changed. How the trees have grown so tall or, how they've been cut down for new developments. Change is a constant reality; it's a tide that we can't hold back. We can only hope to shape and direct change in the right direction.

It's intriguing to me how physical spaces can elicit in us some powerful memories. I think of decisions that I made in those places, life directions that I chose, and ways that God provided for me in the past. As you reflect on our church's past, I hope that you'll feel inspired to make the most of our ministry opportunities in the future.

In 2011, we completed our Sanctuary expansion project. We actually moved our Sunday worship services out of this Sanctuary for a few months and we met over in the MP Gym. This sanctuary used to have only 4 beams in our ceiling. The center of the platform used to be right by the electric plug-in between beams 2 and 3. And, the chair in the front row of Section 4, under beam 5, is right about where the north exterior wall used to be. This year, 2016, we celebrate our 5-year anniversary in our newly expanded Sanctuary.



I'd like to ask one last group of people to stand this morning; anyone who has been attending our church less than 5 years, would you please stand? That's awesome. We are so glad that YOU are here! You are the reason we added on this space. We added on this space so that we could expand ministry; so that there would be plenty of room for more people to learn about Christ and join us in worshipping our awesome God.

And now, as we look forward to the future, to the next 5 or 10 years or more of ministry, let's maintain our commitment to making sure this place is here for many more years to come. As long as the Lord gives us the opportunity, let's make His fame and reputation known through the ministry that happens in and through this building.

When Solomon had the temple built for the LORD, 2 Chronicles 2:18 tells us that he assigned 80,000 stonecutters in the hills and 70,000 carriers, with 3,600 foremen to oversee them. In 2 Chronicles 6:2 Solomon says, "I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever." The temple was huge, it was magnificent. But when Solomon prays later on, at the dedication of the temple, he makes it clear that the magnificence of the structure was never really the key. Solomon humbly prays in 6:18: "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

Just 3 verses later, in 6:21, Solomon recognizes that HEAVEN is God's dwelling place: "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." He repeats this idea of heaven as God's dwelling place again in vv. 30, 33, and 39. Theologically, we understand that our God is omnipresent. He is not confined to any one space the way we are as humans. And we can worship him and pray to Him at any time and any place.

And yet, we read in places like 2 Chronicles 5:14 that, "...the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God." There was certainly something very special about that physical building; God showed up there in some pretty amazing ways. 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 explains how people from all over the world were drawn to God's temple: "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, 33 then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name."

So, the magnificence of the temple structure was never really the key. The key was that it bore God's Name; His reputation was uniquely attached to that particular building. It was a place dedicated to Him and His purposes. People looked toward that place and gathered there to understand God better, to seek the Lord's blessing, and to worship the one true God. That's what we want for the reputation of our church building and the ministries here. We want our Bemidji EFC building to be a place that people will look toward as a place that bears God's Name; a place where people can gather to worship the Lord and seek after His help and blessing. As a Grace Community, we want this building to be a lighthouse to our community and world; to be a place for spiritual growth and spiritual answers.

This morning, we can praise God together for the many opportunities He has given our church throughout our past to be that kind of a place.

And, as we look toward our future mission as a church, we can commit ourselves to continuing this heritage of faith for a long time to come.

And now, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, in the words of Proverbs 3:5-6, "May we trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding. In all our ways, may we acknowledge Him and HE will make our paths straight."

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on November 27, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.