

Reminders For The First Sunday

I can't recall much about the first Sunday in 1967 when the Carbondale Assembly of God congregation moved onto this site. I was here, but I suppose I was too busy handling the drama of junior high to pay much attention. I appreciated the modern look. It was after all, pretty cool. We had new Sunday School classrooms and a fresh new kitchen and fellowship hall. It would be more than twenty years before we made significant changes to the look of the sanctuary in 1990. Once again, although I was the pastor then, I don't recall much about the first Sunday back. The tornado in 1999 took us out of the sanctuary for 87 Sundays, twenty months. I remember the last Sunday at VBI, with snow on the ground, and Pastor Billy Joe joined us so we could express our thanks to him for his graciousness to Carbondale. The next Sunday, January 7, 2001 we were home. Finally, home. It sure felt good and it was a little crowded, I do remember that.

I looked back to see what I said that first Sunday in 2001 and found some reflections I wrote essentially as a prayer. Allow me to read just a portion of it, because I believe it to be the truth for us as a church on this First Sunday. "Lord, we know you aren't impressed by buildings, big or small, common or ornate. But we didn't build this facility to impress you or anyone else. We built it to fulfill what we believe to be your purpose for us as a church. We built it to be a place of healing, hope, laughter and peace. We know if we get preoccupied with this building, then it becomes an idol and we have sinned against you. But if it is truly a place of worship and prayer, a place where the gospel of grace is proclaimed and where the lost and hurting know they can come to find hope, a place where people gather and build relationships and encourage one another, if it is a place where believers are taught and equipping is done, if it is a place where restoration occurs, where redemption and forgiveness are priorities, where children and youth are loved, mentored and disciplined, if it is used as a place to nurture and love and care for the weakest and the least, if by the very design of the building it says to this community and this city, 'Why of course you'll fit here, you belong here, you'll be accepted here, welcome home,' well then, even though you don't dwell in temples made by hands, Lord, I'm pretty sure you will drop by a place like that. It sounds like your kind of place. A place filled with people that understand, people that are more impressed with Jesus than anything we could build with our hands or our money. Lord, help us to be like that, to be your kind of people. Don't let us be impressed with something that is going to wear out or could be blown away in a tornado, something that will burn in the end, instead, let us be grateful for the temporal but may our focus always be upon the

eternal. On this first day to worship in this new facility, I just wanted to say thank you, knowing that every step of the way, through the good days and the bad, you have been leading and guiding us. I wanted you to hear us say it first thing, that we take no pride or glory in this because you alone deserve the glory. All of this has come from your hand and we humbly say thank you... We won't forget the things that are truly important. We won't be dazzled or even distracted by the new facility (at least not for long) instead we will continue to look to you as we have always done, regardless of our circumstances or condition and we will try to keep building your kingdom and never our own. Please keep teaching us how." Amen.

Allow me to take just a moment to acknowledge some people. (Charlie and Sally Daniels. Builder and friend. Gary Armbruster, architect. Brandon Conklin. Tracey Bradshaw)

Acknowledge our board and especially our staff. Extraordinary folks who have worked so hard. Matt Bruner who has set up and moved at least a million chairs! Everyone who has volunteered and helped and remained flexible and kind through our ten month exile in the gym, thank you!! And to everyone who has given to our Rise and Build campaign to help pay for this – thank you!!

With that said, can we one more time express our thanks and gratitude to God for his extraordinary gifts and blessings to us!

I've often said part of the calling of a pastor is to help us see the events of our lives in the context of our faith. That's what I want to try to do this morning by sharing some reminders for the first Sunday in our new sanctuary.

First of all, **Remember God doesn't live in temples made by hands.** Don't get the building confused with the church. We've built a place dedicated to God's service and to the proclamation of his word, but he doesn't live here. He lives within us, his people, his church. The apostle Paul told the men of Athens, "**The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.**" Acts 17:24. The pagans built ornate temples to house their gods. Their idols sat in those temples, but they didn't live there. They couldn't, they weren't alive to begin with. But the God who created all things, he can't be contained in any building

Solomon built the first temple. He said, "**The temple I am going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods. But who is able to build a temple for him,**

since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?” 2 Chronicles 2:6-7

Solomon was saying, I'm going to build a temple that will be great and beautiful. He was building it to point to the greatness and beauty of God. But Solomon recognized that God is greater than any building. His beauty and nature and holiness are beyond anything we can imagine or attempt to portray. He was building a temple that would not contain God, but would serve as a place to worship God, a place to offer sacrifice and praise to God, a place that would honor and acknowledge the God who is creator and Savior of the world.

What we've built, what we've done in the sanctuary I hope will draw attention to the Lord and not ourselves. For the first time in this sanctuary there is no barrier above and in front of us, no lip above the platform. Instead, architecturally and aesthetically it soars upward, causing our eyes to be lifted up, not cast down. It causes us to look up to the Lord our source. He doesn't live here, but sanctuaries like this remind us of his transcendence, they cause us to reflect upon his splendor, the beauty of his character and grace. Allow your spirit to soar above the trouble, let your eyes and your heart be lifted up to the Lord in praise and adoration. Be reminded that he is eternal, he is mighty and he is good!

The second reminder: **Don't be distracted by the tools or the technology. Keep your eyes on Jesus!** As you know we've added new technology and lighting and video, some of which you're seeing this morning. There is quite a learning curve and we are trying to learn as fast as we can. If you've ever moved into a new house with all new furniture and appliances you know there is a period where you keep saying, "I didn't know it would do that!" That's where we are right now. Give us time. Things will likely keep changing over the next few weeks but don't be distracted by the technology. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Friday night for the women's conference we were panicked because we didn't have all the sound equipment and some other things working right. It was a good reminder that our trust and hope isn't in the sound equipment or in the lights or video or environmental projection. Our hope and trust is in the Lord. He is our source.

In the Old Testament there were numerous times when Israel wanted to make alliances with other countries, pagan countries, because they had more weapons and more chariots and more soldiers to fight battles and the Lord would often remind his people not to trust in horses

and chariots but to trust in the Lord. He didn't tell them not to use horses and chariots, he just told them their trust needed to rest in the Lord, not in their fire power or horse power, literally.

Don't be distracted. It's not about the building, or the technology. All of this is just a tool for us to use to build His kingdom, to advance the message of the gospel. All of this facility is just a tool to be used to reach more people with the good news of Jesus and his redeeming grace. Keep looking to Jesus. The writer of Hebrews said, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...” Hebrews 12:2** Thank God we'll soon be live streaming our Sunday service and we'll be able to reach more people with the gospel. Thank God for more room to gather, to grow together, thank God for new opportunity, for a new season of harvest and victory for this church. It will come as long as we refuse to be distracted and we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus!

Another reminder for the first Sunday: **The work's not completed, it's just getting started.** “Thank God we got the building completed, now maybe we can get some rest.” The building maybe finished (there are still things to be done in the building, completing the parking lot, etc.) but the real work is just getting started. The question now is how do we best use this building, this new set of tools the Lord has provided for us? How do we best use these tools to advance the kingdom, to tell others about Jesus and disciple believers? We've got work to do. We've got new methods to use, we've got more doors opened, but we will need more volunteers, more prayer, more help, more creativity. We need more of Jesus and the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Don't think we've finished something, we are just getting started.

Don't get me wrong. We are celebrating this morning. I am so thankful and grateful that this part is done. Hallelujah! But understand it's just a new set of tools. I know some of you will be shocked to hear this, but I love getting new tools. I love tools. I'm just not very good with them. I don't know how to use them. I don't want that to be the case at Carbondale. I want us to do more than simply possess the latest tools, I want us to use them. Let's celebrate where we are this morning and what the Lord has done, then let's get busy while we have time and opportunity and figure out how to use our new tools to tell the world about Jesus.

Another reminder: **Thank God for every gift and giver and remember, it isn't paid for...yet!** Thank God for his incredible provision for us over this past year. Our giving, your giving has been extraordinary! To God be the glory. Experts tell us it is harder to pay off debt and they warn the giving will fall off. I'm believing for God's continued blessing and

supernatural provision so we can quickly pay this off. He has supplied and he will continue to supply as we continue to trust and obey. Remember on this first Sunday to thank God for his provision and let's keep on giving. Believing for unexpected resources to come to you and us.

Two more reminders for this first Sunday. **Remember where we came from.** We've been careful to pay tribute to our past in this new facility. We purposely kept and repaired the bell tower. The architects purposely carried the original design of the sanctuary, the wood ceiling for instance, out into the gathering areas (notice the Rulon ceilings over the carpeted areas.) We purposely saved the rock from the original front of the church and placed it back into the rock wings on the exterior. We wanted it to be a blending of the old and the new, because we remember where we came from. We recall the value of our history, the legacy that has been handed to us. We guard well the faith that has been delivered to us. The methods change, the technology changes and we've done our best to upgrade those things, but the faith entrusted to us is an ancient faith, tried and tested by time, opposed by skeptics and tyrants who have tried to stamp it out and extinguish its flame but the faith still burns bright and bold in the hearts and lives of God's people. We remember where we came from and the price that was paid to advance the cause of Christ. We remember the sacrifices made so we could worship here, today, in this new sanctuary. We must never forget where we came from and the people who got us here.

Remember where we are going. It feels different in here today, but at the same time, it feels like home. Even though the lights and the images on the walls are different, or the carpet or the stone are different, there is something familiar about the whole thing. It's because Jesus and the family are here. It feels a little like home, yet not quite. That's the way it's supposed to be. The church gathered always reminds us a little of home, yet not quite, because we aren't there yet, but one day...one day we'll be home. And we will walk into God's presence. I think this is beautiful and it calls my heart to a worshipful response, but all the stone and lights and sound and images and beauty in this world can't begin to suggest to us the beauty and glory and splendor that will await when we step into God's holy and eternal presence. And as overwhelming as it will all be, somehow I believe in our hearts it will register, "home." We're home again this morning, and not yet. We've got a lot of work to do before we go home. Let's devote ourselves to using these new tools to announce the good news, to serve our generation and prepare the next, until we're all gathered home. Just some reminders for our first Sunday!