

The Church- the Temple of the Holy Spirit Ephesians 2:11-22

To begin I will recap on last week's message and don't worry. I'm not going to mention s-e-x. OK? So relax, breathe and reflect your own personalising of **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** *My Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit –Who is in me–Whom I have received from God. I am not my own. I was bought at a price therefore I honour God with my body*
So:

I am a Temple of the Holy Spirit; It is true I am-now look at yourself.
You are a Temple of the Holy Spirit; and collectively, look at the person sitting beside you on the pew, and then those around you
We the [local] church [gathered here today] are the Temple of the Holy Spirit...

Jesus said (**Matthew 18:20**) *“Where ever two or more are gathered together in my name there I am in their presence, meaning with and among them”*. For Jesus this was a present continuous promise until the day of his return when we add his words, “And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” (**Matthew 28:20**).

Jesus' promised presence was to be in the form of the gift of the Father, the Spirit that came upon the disciples at Pentecost [33 AD] empowering and putting His seal on them as the people of God- 'The Church- the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul wrote 22 years [55 AD] later to the believers in the Church at Corinth on this theme.

1 Corinthians 3 ¹⁶ *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives among you?*

¹⁷ *... for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

The same year Paul reminded them again in a second letter

2 Corinthians 6:16 *“... For we are the temple of the living God.”*

And this temple he referred to was built from “living stones”. Now...

Five years later [60 AD] Peter, an apostolic rock of truth and authority of Christ's Words on which the church was built, wrote this. **1 Peter 2**
⁴ *As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him –⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

This house or temple is spiritual in a metaphorical sense, but also in that it is formed and indwelt by the spirit of God. The Holy Spirit, sent by the exalted living stone, Jesus Christ, has made every stone in the house alive.

Importantly, the LORD has a purpose for which He has established the church and that is- *to become a Holy Temple in him, made from living stones*. Paul wrote, about the same time that Peter did, to the **Ephesians 2** ¹⁹ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* ²¹ *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.* ²² *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

In this scripture Paul transitions the picture of the church as an extended family household including both Jew and Gentile, who have access to the Father by one Spirit, to the thought of the temple in which God dwells. In the ancient world a temple was not a place for public worship, like a church building, but the actual dwelling place of the deity/god. The building is defined, not by the general term for temple, but as an inner shrine where God manifests His glory.

And it is the Old Testament temple that provides the background for our New Testament passages. The original word for *temple* has a beautiful and deep meaning because it refers not to the Jewish Temple as a whole, not to the inner courts, or even to the Holy place, but to the inner sanctum of the Holy of Holies where God's very presence dwelt amongst the two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. Which is now the inner sanctum of God's own people, the church the temple where He dwells.

Which makes me think. If our church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, then for anyone joining in our fellowship this morning, entering our

presence should be like walking into the Holy of Holies... Right?
 ...because both Peter and Paul describe the church as such a holy temple with the Word of God as its foundation. The Word that was especially entrusted to the apostles and prophets in the Church as those commissioned to proclaim and interpret it. They had a primary responsibility for building up the community of faith to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit, a dwelling in which the chief cornerstone was to bind the parts of the building together and give to the walls their lines. Upon Christ the whole structure rests...
 And it is His power that shapes the building and guarantees its growth towards completeness. The Gentiles have their place in the Holy structure. They are like the new tiers of stone that are constantly rising upon the foundation as the building continues to be erected. And Paul makes his point clearly that the Living God displays His presence in the world through the living stones of this holy temple, the Temple created by the Spirit to manifest God's glory. A manifestation that begins with us on the inside for...

The church is meant to consist of relationships between the members: If it is in Christ that the whole structure of the building is joined together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord v.21 it stands to reason then, that we must be concerned about each other...
 What is true for the temple of the Holy Spirit...is true for the people of God. We are eternally in this together. When we do it God's way we experience God's blessings of his real presence and what I call real Christ-centred Spirit-filled relationships. It is the Spirit that brings us together. We should all be praying then for the Spirit to unite us in Christ and that in such unity we might love each other as Christ loved us. We must come together, as diverse as we are, in unity. And it is the Holy Spirit with his gifts, who designs this variety making for such diversity, the richness in the Church, and unites everything and everyone, so as to constitute a spiritual temple, where we offer not sacrifices, but ourselves, our very lives.

The Church is not an interweaving of things and interests, but is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple where God works, the temple where each of us, with the gift of one baptism and Spirit, is a living

stone. Which informs us that no one is useless in the Church, because no one is without a purpose in the Church. We are all necessary to build this Temple! Everyone is a part of it and has an equally important role to play. No one is the most important in the Church; we are all equal in God's eyes whether you're cleaning the toilets, welcoming at the door, serving tea, helping with the music or preaching. Someone could say: "Kent as an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the PCANZ you're not equal to us". And my response is this, "I am just like each one of you. We are equal **because** we are brothers and sisters in Christ!" No one individual is most important in the church and, nobody is anonymous.

Nobody is anonymous: for we all form and build the Church. This thought invites us to reflect on the fact that if the living stone of our Christian life is lacking from the temple, something is missing from the beauty of the Church. Such is the case with who say they believe in Christ but vow and declare, "I won't have anything to do with God's people gathering together. My belief is my own, between God and me. I will have nothing to do with the Church". In this way, that stone of one life is missing from this beautiful Temple. Jesus heart would have it that none would reject, let alone desert and leave his temple of the Holy Spirit. Instead, Christ calls each and every believer to bring to the Church our life, our heart, our love, our thought, our work: all of us together.

With this in mind I would like then for us to ask ourselves:

How can we actually live out 'being Church'?

1. Are we living stones or are we, so to speak, tired, bored, indifferent stones? Have you experienced how unattractive it is to see a tired, bored, indifferent Christian? I ask you, is this a good look or not? Christ calls his followers to be alive, as in vibrant and joyful about being Christian. I'm not talking about joy as in singing loudly while you swing from the rafters, although this might be the way God has wired and made you to express yourself. What I am talking about is this. Do you reflect in your countenance the inner beauty, peace and joy of your salvation that God's Spirit gave you when you first believed or came to the realisation that you were saved for eternity by Christ? As Christ's followers we must live this beauty of being part of the People of God, the Church.

2. Do we open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit to be an active part in our community?

Each one of us having been given at least one spiritual gift that is to be used to encourage and build up the body of Christ, and in doing so Bring Glory to God. Or, do we close in on ourselves, saying: "I am too busy, with too much to do and not enough time to do it. Jesus, you and your Church will just have to do without me. Get another stone." Yes we are busy people, often overwhelmed by living in today's world to which I would say. May the Lord give us his grace, his strength, so that as a first priority we may be deeply united to Christ, the cornerstone of our lives and the whole life of the Church.

It is my hope and prayer that whatever the situation, we will each remain, or once again become, vibrant through Christ's Spirit in such a way, that we will always be living and active stones of His Temple.

His temple that speaks to our minds of the history, beginning with the story of God's People Israel in the Old Testament, that is there to inspire us. In Jerusalem, the great Temple of Solomon was the site of the encounter with God in prayer; inside the temple, in the holy of holies there was the Ark of the Covenant, a sign of the presence of God in the midst of the people; and in the Ark were the Tablets of the Law, the manna and the rod of Aaron: a reminder of the fact that God was always present in the history of his people, he had accompanied them on their journey, he had guided their steps. Like the Israelites, we too when we come together to worship should remember this story, along with each our own history, how Jesus found me, how Jesus has walked with me, how Jesus loves me and blesses me.

Conclusion:

Being the Temple of the Holy Spirit is an incredible gift and an unbelievable blessing. But we cannot lose site of God's mission in making us his temple. The ancient temple was meant to be a sign to all nations that the God of Israel was the one true God, the one of splendour, majesty, power and love for his children.

The temple was meant to be the Glory of God on display in the all the world, for all nations to draw near to him and his presence.

Well, we are the temple now. We are the display of God's power, splendour, blessing, love, mercy, justice, and glory, by his presence in us. He did not just give us his Spirit as a gift, he has given it to us

so that all the world may see Christ and come to know him as God our Saviour, who loves any who turn to him.

This is why, by his empowering presence, we pursue holiness and unity as God's living temple—for Christ's sake, for his glory, and for the sake of the world's salvation.

Beginning for us as a church right here in Drury and flowing out from this place as you leave here this morning to go back to your family, neighbourhood, business, employment, sports, school and social circles, where it is that you live your life for the rest of the week. And God bless us as the Church—the temple of the Holy Spirit as we take his holy and empowering presence with us.

I will finish with Jesus' prayer for all believers from **John 17:20-23**:

“I pray also for you who will believe in me through the message, that all of you may be one.

Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”.

Amen.