

We are the temple of God

1 Corinthians 3:16 HCSB Don't you know that you are God's sanctuary and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

We have come together today to dedicate this place of worship to the glory of God and the spiritual enrichment of this community. This type of occasion is usually filled with a certain spiritual fervor. Certainly this was the case at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem.¹

However, we stand warned by that very example because in spite of the wonderful intentions of the people, both the First and Second Temples declined into symbols of ethnic prestige and religious pride.

It was within that context that the Lord Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

- John 4:21-24 HCSB ... "Believe Me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (22) You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. (23) But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. (24) God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

We dedicate not just a building but ourselves.

We are certainly allowed to celebrate a great work, well done and motivated by a desire to worship and serve Yahweh Adonai. However, the dedication of a house of worship is essentially the dedication of the people who choose to worship there.

Before a valid construction can be made, personal moral worth has to be realized. Remember that David was not allowed to build the Temple because he had shed much blood and waged great wars.² Desire to build, to glorify God, to create a sacred space was not enough. The character of the people is far more important than any building they may construct.

This building is a reminder of the need for justice.

Biblically, the idea of sanctifying a people or an institution has *always* been a renewed commitment to practicing justice. Justice is, after all, the practical outworking of sanctity. Justice is, after all, love distributed fairly. So, we seek to incarnate God's concern for fullness of life for all people.

Jesus taught,

- Matthew 5:23-24 HCSB So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

When we practice justice among ourselves, we validate the worship we bring in this place. I submit that if we are not loving our spouses, raising our children, working hard for our bosses, paying our debts, and caring for those who cannot care for themselves, then no matter how professional our music, our lights, or our oratory – God does not accept our worship.

It is because we often struggle with matters of justice personally, congregationally, nationally, and internationally that we need such places to remember what's truly important.

This building is a reminder of our spiritual needs.

¹ 1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 6

² 1 Chronicles 22:8; 28:3

Every place of worship is in essence a reminder of the spiritual gulf – the distance created by our sin – that marks our religious life.

So, the dedication of such a building can be a bitter-sweet experience because it represents an opportunity to confess our continuing need for personal and institutional repentance.

It is because we are naturally a rebellious and stiff-necked people that we **need** places like this to be reminded of our duties to our King.

This building is a reminder that our King has not yet returned.

Note that the Apostle John stated that in the City of God there will be no need for a temple “because the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary.”³

It is precisely because our King is not yet among us that we still have need of such places.

God cannot be localized.

The dedication of a “house of God” should certainly not reinforce the ancient superstition that God is somehow localized in some special and unique way to this place. That would be the essence of idolatry.

It is the same mistake Jonah made when he thought that by travelling from Joppa to Tarshish (a city in Spain) that he could somehow escape the sovereign God of the universe.

It is the same mistake the Arameans made. They thought the Lord is a god of the mountains and not a god of the valleys. As a result Hashem gave their entire, immense horde over to us to be conquered.⁴

The Spirit, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, is like the wind that blows where it pleases.⁵ It is not amenable to human control. Yahweh Adonai does not reside on the mountains or in the temples of this world. He is a Spirit and He can be worshipped only in spirit and in truth.

- To worship in spirit is to rise above the patterns of idol-worship which confines God to a designated place and insulates the rest of our lives from the claims of God’s authority.
- To worship God in spirit is to refuse to confine God to places and schedules of worship.
- To worship Him in truth is to bring the practical details of our life and work into harmony with our relationship with God.

Listen to me! God cannot be localized to this building. Will God indeed live on earth? Even heaven, the highest heaven, cannot contain Him much less this sanctuary we have built.⁶ The good news is that God is everywhere and He is in solidarity with the whole of creation. This sanctuary is simply one of many signposts to that reality.

Therefore, we need to go out!

As a congregation, our spiritual task is not to multiply shrines but to illumine the holy foundation upon which our lives are built...

- [1 Corinthians 3:11 HCSB](#) because no one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid--that is, Jesus Christ.

While living among us, Jesus did not set His throne in the Holy of Holies, though that was certainly His prerogative. While the Sadducees and Pharisees forced everyone to come to the Temple, Jesus went out among us and met us in the warp and woof of our lives. People

³ Revelation 21:22

⁴ 1 Kings 20:28

⁵ John 3:8

⁶ 1 Kings 8:27

were healed as a result. People were fed as a result. People believed and were led out of the kingdom of darkness, blinking in the light of God's holy promises to His people.

While living among us, Jesus reached out and touched the untouchable. He laid hands on the lepers.⁷ To be Jesus' disciples is to imitate Him in this.

- True holiness reaches out.
- True sanctity does not insulate; preventing or reducing the transmission of God's power to the world that surrounds us. We don't seek isolation or detachment.
- True holiness – Godlikeness – expresses itself by reaching out, touching, and healing.

True religion and undefiled should not be localized anyway. It should be liberated from these four confining walls and spread to the four corners of the Earth. The key word of the Great Commission is not build but rather is "Go." We have been called in, in order to be sent out.

This place must not become a mere sanctuary, a place where people retreat in search of comfort and solace. We dare not allow it to become an ecclesiastical ghetto. Instead, it should become a well-spring for rivers of justice that satiate the poor, oppressed slaves of the dark kingdom. As Hashem told the prophet Amos,

- [Amos 5:23-24 HCSB](#) Take away from Me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. (24) But let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream.

We come here to be encouraged and instructed; warned and exhorted. This church is not a passive, isolating fortress but an aggressive, forward-thinking staging point. It is a mounting area where we regroup, refuel, exercise, get inspected, and redistribute supplies and ammo before heading out to the battlefield. We come here to be reminded of the proper values and priorities - then we return to the battle front with our hands strengthened and our feet steadied.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, a church is not just a building. It is the people of God united through their partnership in the ministry. All of you, re-constituted as the Body of Christ through your partnership with Jesus in the ministry, are God's temple in this place. Together you constitute the sacred space within which God's love and compassion find expression.

So, it is not a building that we dedicate today. What we dedicate today is a serving community. That dedication is not a matter of some pious posturing. It is a prophetic call to integrate the secular and the sacred, work and worship, the mundane with the eternal.

We dedicate this building as a reminder that unless we receive from a source higher than ourselves, there is nothing of value that we can give to our fellow human beings.

This dedication service is, hence, a beginning rather than an end. We are not here to build a building; our business is to build the Kingdom of God.

Concluding prayerful hope

May CBF always nurture a culture of outreach.

May we disavow throwing token gifts at the world, but instead go out ourselves to be among them.

As the Messiah identified Himself with "the least of these" may we also empathize **with** and taken on the burdens **of** those in need around us whether that need is spiritual or physical.

⁷ Matthew 8:3

May this sanctuary not be a token of our political and social success, but instead be a material witness to the centrality of God in our lives. Let it represent a commitment to the prophetic nature of the work that we do here.

May the life and witness of this building be a call to fruitfulness and fullness of life for many generations to come.

May we ever rejoice under the yoke of the Messiah.