We have a Building from God

Collect

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

First Reading 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture--"I believed, and so I spoke"--we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The Gospel Mark 3:20-35

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" -- for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."
Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

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**I. Beyond the Church of Dull and Boring**

**Boring and Dull: A Perfect Union!**

- I have often wondered how conversations go around the planning tables of professions other than my own
- Take for instance the weird and wonderful world of town planners
  - How do you suppose exactly approval got given to these place names:
    - Hell, Michigan
    - Crapstone, Devon, UK
    - Thong, Kent, UK
    - Looneyville, Texas
- You may have you own theories about that last one
- On that list of strangely named places is Boring, Oregon
  - It is a town of 12,000 people on the northern border of the state, with this tagline on the town website: 'Boring, an exciting place to call home!'
• Formally a thriving timber town, Boring has been looking for a new lease of life and came up with the delightful brain-wave to twin Boring, OR to a village in Perth and Kinross, Scotland called Dull.
  ◦ Boring and Dull, you might say that it was a match made in heaven

  ◦ Marjorie Keddie, Community council chairwoman of Dull, stated to the BBC: "We are also excited at the prospect of a new road sign, which will say something like 'Dull, in association with Boring'"

  ◦ There has since been a coup d'état led by the Village of Dull's Tourist Board and Mrs Keddie is now under house arrest and not permitted to speak to the press, ever again.

• Strictly speaking that last part is not true, but in a perfect world it would be!
Dull and Boring: The Church's Epitaph?

- I sometimes wonder if 'dull and boring' is a twinning that the Church is in danger of embodying for people

- Thinking about the so-called Generation-Z, people born through the 1990's to the current day, and perhaps also Generation-Y, or Millennials, born somewhere in the 1980's
  - Church is dull: dark spaces, alien looking, the architectural opposite of an Apple Store
  - And Church is boring: slow pace, strange language, and sometimes strange people too

- When this perception, no matter what resemblance it has to reality, is locked into people's minds 'Dull and Boring' are in danger of becoming the Church's epitaph, what we will read in our history books about the decline and death of the Church as we know it

- Well, I don't know about you, but I am not prepared to go down with that ship! Church needn't be dull or boring.
II. A building that teaches to us

An Inviting Church

• And it's in that fighting spirit that we begin today a process with our townhall after this service to craft together a detailed vision for our place on the local landscape of this community of Pacific Beach and beyond

• We can avoid the death-knell designation of 'dull and boring', not only by how we are as people, but also by how our physical space opens up to those who are not yet a part of our common life

• Yet, this process of re-imagining and re-shaping our physical space is just half of the story
  ◦ We can have the most intentionally missional facility in the whole of San Diego, but without an invitation to come experience it, the effort is in vain

• So, I offer you this morning some food for thought about what it is that you might say to people should you wish to invite them to this space and more importantly to this community

• I want to do so through the eyes of this building, our sanctuary
  ◦ This space, these windows in particular, have something to teach us in the art of invitation in three easy to remember lessons!
III. Lesson One: How not to be the Church of Monty Python

Picture One: The church of the big heavenly foot

• Too often this is the image of the Church people have: an imposing God who wants us to do what he dictates – which mostly means not having much fun – or we run the risk of being squashed

• This is the sort of God that the people confused Jesus with when they accused him of being out of his mind, of being out of control, of being dangerous to them

• This is a God over against us – an angry, judgmental God - a God that so many people seem to think is the only one on offer

• You and I need to make a different sort of case to the world about God
Picture Two: *The person connected to the foot*

- Where we have to invite people to is the possibility that there is a person connected to that foot

- This is not the Monty Python God, poised to squash onto the sidewalk his errant creation, this is the God made human in Jesus. This is our spiritual brother, as Jesus declares in our gospel, whose kin we get to become by *loving into* his Word

Picture Three: *It is about a relationship*

- Jesus is God and we are not, but this is a *relationship* that we are invited to. A relationship which beckons us to new life

- **So, let's re-imagine that Monty Python Church for people:** let's talk about a Church where we declare the shocking claim that the Creator of Heaven and Earth is also our brother
IV. Lesson Two: *Tell people that this is a community that walks the talk*

**Picture One: Our Baptismal Identity**

- One of the most profound implications of being the kin of the God we meet in Jesus is that we are therefore called to be the kin of all people, through Christ

- As a people of the *Book of Common Prayer*, we find our identity as equals to one another and as ministers of what the Church calls the first order – what is most important - of ministry: the ministry of all the baptized

- Those baptismal vows commit us to seek and serve the dignity of every human being

- **Let people know that this is a church that walks the talk:**
  - Tell them and invite them to help out at our hunger suppers
  - Encourage them to teach us about opportunities for service to others that we might not yet know about or might not have imagined that we could be capable of...
...and that we find that it is through our service to others that our lives reach heavenwards and so we are changed as Paul puts it in his letter to the Corinthians that we heard from this morning: 'our inner nature is being renewed day by day.'

Quick Recap

Not the Church of Monty Python but a Church that Walks the Talk
V. Lesson Three: *Tell people that this is a community that also wants to talk the talk*

**Picture One: William Temple's Thinking Church**

- The third lesson that our sanctuary teaches us in the art of invitation is that this is a community that we can invite people to to be in conversation with us.
- This is a big tent church, for all of the struggles with schism, Anglicanism is a tradition that loves the debate, loves for people to use their minds.
  - Here's some of the comedian Robin Williams' **top ten reasons to be an Episcopalian**:
    - You don't have to check your brains at the door.
    - You can believe in dinosaurs.
    - No matter what you believe, there's bound to be at least one other Episcopalian who agrees with you.
  - I also think that some of the other reasons might be worth promoting on the side:
    - No snake handling.
    - Free wine on Sunday.
    - And for those of you with a previous connection to the Roman Church: *'All of the pageantry - none of the guilt.'*
VI. We have a Building from God

- There we have it: **an inviting church in three easy lessons!**
  - This is not the Church of Monty Python
  - This is a church that walks the talk
  - And this is a church that likes to talk the talk too!

- **So, how does this connect with our later conversation about our physical space and facility?**
  - As is so often the case, Paul has a great answer ready for us to consider:
    
    'we have a building from God'

- As Paul meant it in his letter to the Corinthians the building referred to is our bodies. We are the Church, the body of Christ:
  - 'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

- Yet, unlike Paul's early church, we have a building, also from God, indeed made with human hands: *these* church buildings and common spaces
Picture One: A sin of Omission/old-mission

- What too often happens is that when we talk to people about 'the church' what people think we are talking about is the building

- It is – in another nod to those of you who have a connection with the Roman Church – a sin of omission

- It might equally be called a sin of old-mission:
  - For too long the church has suffered from what our bishop likes to call its 'edifice complex'
  - We equate the church with the building and so the formula to a vibrant church life is to make the building as attractive as possible and then 'they' will come
  - It is also known as 'red-door evangelism'

- There are two things fundamentally missing from this approach:
  - The people in the building
  - The community outside the building
Picture Two: Building and People

- Here we see the people and the building in the same frame, gathered under the symbol of the cross.

- Yet the problem that persists with this image is that the two people on the right are faced toward the building with their backs turned to the world beyond.
Pictures Three, Four, Five, Six: Our Window to the World

- The inherent danger for us in seeking to think intentionally about our current facility’s suitability for mission is that we become too focused on the building such that it becomes hard for us to see what lies on the other side.

- Yet, if we look more closely, we also see how each part of our life here and this great legacy that our forebears have left us offer a window into the world.

- We do have a building from God, and if we are attentive to the Spirit's call, we too may catch the fire of that Spirit's movement in our time and place, as with the people of ancient Corinth, and 'look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen'.
We cannot see what God's future in mission has in store for Pacific Beach and for the city beyond it.

Nor can we see what God has in store for each of our lives individually: God did not promise to make life easy, he promised to send us the Spirit.

We have a building from God, we are a people of God.

These buildings and grounds, this beautiful space on the landscape of this neighborhood, is our window into the world, yet we are the lens through which people will see the Church. We are lens through which people will see God.

Let us step forward with confidence and faith that the future of God's mission in this time and place is bright and exciting and filled with the Spirit who promises to set our hearts and lives on fire if we are prepared just to let that fire burn.

Amen.