

Text: The building. Facility explanation Sunday. **February 8, 2015.**

Grace and peace are yours through Christ our Cornerstone. Amen.

If these walls could talk, if these walls could talk, what would they say? Actually, these walls are talking. This building is speaking to us. Can you hear it? Listen closer. Still having trouble? Ok, I suppose in a sense, the walls aren't going to speak for themselves, so let me speak for them today. When this facility was designed as a special place to worship Jesus, many people spent countless hours not just laying tile and painting and all those important things, time was spent thinking, planning, preparing for what these walls would say. What message is our building sending? Listen closely and you'll hear this message, "Jesus. Forgiveness. Jesus. Forgiveness."

Let's start up front with the thing the likely grabs your attention right away. The triptych. Triptych is not only a funny crossword puzzle word, it's a word that means three images. Triptychs have been used in Lutheran churches for centuries and they seem to be making a bit of a comeback. The center image of the three does not change. The picture is taken from John chapter 20. Jesus has risen from the dead! He is appearing to Mary Magdalene. But she doesn't realize it's Jesus. She's so distraught at the death of her teacher, and so overwhelmed with grief, she can't see Jesus standing right in front of her. Until Jesus speaks her name, "Mary." Then her eyes are opened and she finally sees the Resurrected Jesus. Center panels in triptychs are usually connected with the name of the congregation, so we have a panel showing the resurrection.

The side panels change with the different seasons of the church year. Now we have the panels for Christmas, the birth of Jesus, and Epiphany. Epiphany means to show. It's the time when we hear the Good news that Jesus showed, "I am the Savior of all the world." Men, wise men we call them, came from far away to worship Jesus. This shows that Jesus truly is the Savior of all. You can usually find an explanation of the side triptych panels on the back of the service folder. The letters at the top of the triptych that look like an A and a horseshoe are actually the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In Revelation Jesus calls himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Jesus never changes in his love for us. His forgiveness is the same for us from beginning to end.

Forgiveness he won for us on the cross. Let's look there next. The cross is the center of God's message to us in the Bible. Christ crucified is the center of our preaching and teaching. 1 Corinthians says, "We preach Christ crucified!" and, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The cross with the body of Jesus on it, often called a crucifix, maybe seem a little gory, ugly, even hideous. But this shows us that Jesus really died for our sins, so great was his love for us. The crucifix shows the great price of our sins and greater than that, while we were still sinners Christ died for us. You may have been here for a service in which the cross was carried in during the service. This is called a procession. Processions during worship were common in the Bible, especially on major events. Carrying the cross into worship, reminds us to lift high the cross and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Move your eyes now to the altar. And by the way, I'd encourage you after the service to come up and take a closer look at the details and fine craftsmanship of all the furnishings God has provided. The people involved with planning this facility really strove to give God the very best and God be praised that we can worship him in such a place. Really, come up after the service and take a closer look. You will be in awe. The altar screams, "Jesus!" to us. The three letters on the front are the first three Greek letters in the name of Jesus, so Jesus is right there. The altar itself serves a two-fold purpose. The altar is the symbol of God's presence in our worship area. That's why pastor faces the altar when speaking for the people to God and faces the people when speaking for God to the people. The altar is also the table where we celebrate the Lord's Supper, so Pastor or Vicar stands behind the altar to stand in Christ's place as the host of this holy meal. Our altar is a freestanding altar, or one not placed against a wall, specifically so that Pastor or Vicar can stand in this special place and speak Christ's wonderful words, "this is my body. Given for you. This is my blood. Shed for you," directly into the eyes and hearts of God's people. It was actually Lutherans who first used freestanding altars and we can see the good reasons for doing so.

But look closer at the altar. Its shape is tomb like, to remind us of Jesus' death for our sins. But on the top, the shape is more like a table, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. So the altar is both tomb and table. It shows us both Jesus' sacrifice and Jesus' supper. You'll have to come up close to see the five blood red crosses on the altar, standing for the five wounds of Christ, one nail in each hand and foot and one spear in his side. The altar is bare to remind us of how Christ was laid bare on the cross for all to see. You notice that the only things we put on the altar are two candles, one for the human nature of Christ and one for his divine nature, and the elements of Christ's body and blood for the Lord's Supper. This bareness allows us to focus on the meaning of the altar and not be distracted by clutter. I pray you have noticed that and it's one thing I really like about our worship space. No clutter. Focus on Christ. His resurrection in the triptych. His death on the cross. His body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

And his Word here at the ambo. Ambo is a word that means mountain. The book of Isaiah tells us to proclaim good news from the mountain. From this mountain we hear the good news of great joy every time we worship. This ambo is reserved for the reading and preaching of God's Word. What is said from this pulpit is what the Lord says. We don't read announcements from the ambo. We read God's Word. When you first walk in, you might think that the ambo is in an unusual place, kind of off center. Actually, the placement of the ambo was purposefully located along the backbone of the building, the long spine that runs the entire length of the facility to show that God's Word is the backbone, the very spine and nervous system of our church.

Now look at or think about the baptismal font. Please don't say that the font is at the back of the church. The font is at the entrance to the church to remind us how Christ brought us into his Church, through water and the Word. The font is eight sided. That's because the number eight has been connected with baptism all the way back to the Bible. 1 Peter 3 says that just as eight people were saved in the ark by the waters of Noah's flood, so we are saved by the waters of baptism. We have the water running during worship to remind us that Jesus' forgiveness in baptism is a living fountain of living water that gives us new life, that never dries up, that never goes stale.

Do you see how these major elements, these eye-grIPPING furnishings in our worship space are talking? They are telling us, "Jesus rose, front and center. Jesus died. Jesus gives us his body and blood. Jesus' word is the backbone of everything. Jesus baptized you to bring you into his church and declare you to be his child."

But there's more. Just notice how you are seated. The wide seating on all sides shows how God's people gather around his Word. That's what worship is: God's people gathering around his Word and Sacraments. We are close to God's Word as he is close to us. Our church was designed to see and hear and feel the presence of others. You are not alone. You are gathered in Jesus' name and so Jesus is with us.

Now take a look around. Notice the windows. Many of them are still clear glass to let in natural light as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. The candles show us that as well. The stain glass window in place is a picture of Jesus' baptism. Notice how this window lines up with the baptismal font. The window above the ambo focuses on the preaching of God's Word. As Jesus preached God's Word from a boat, so we preach God's Word from this ambo. The large window that is most prominent, will one day have a picture of Jesus bursting from the tomb. Our church is called Resurrection, remember?

Now look up. What do you see? Do you see a star? "A star, but I'm inside," you say. But do you see how the peaks of the roof join together to make a star-like shape? This is to point our attention up, to the heavens, to God. This star-shaped pattern reminds us of the star that guided the wise men to Jesus and also to one of the names used for Jesus, the bright and morning star.

While your eyes are looking up, take a look at the lights. Let's look at the big ones hanging down first. There are twelve of them altogether, six in the sanctuary and six outside of it. Twelve is the Bible's number of Christ's Church, all those who trust in Christ as their Savior. Think of twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. Twelve apostles in the new Testament. These twelve lights remind us that while some of Christ's believers are currently inside the Church, there are still many more who will believe who are still outside the Church, whom Christ will bring in through his Word and through our witness. I pray when you look at those lights you think of those who don't yet believe in Jesus and are encouraged to be the light to bring Jesus to them, so they may share in faith in Jesus and ultimately heaven. Who knew lights could say so much?

You also notice twelve lights in a semi-circle. Again, twelve for the number of believers. And the semi-circle has meaning as well. The lights start above the font, where Christ declared, "You are my child." The lights end at the altar where Christ says, "You are forgiven. Here's my body and blood as personalized proof." In between the lights aren't in a straight line. They curve. They stray. They wander. Just like us. Did you heart wander onto hatred this week? Your brother went in your room without permission and you thought, "I hate you. I'm going to get back at you." And you promptly did by slugging him? Did your eyes wander onto magazines in the grocery store or all places, onto TV shows. I was just trying to watch the game, onto websites where your eyes don't belong? Have you strayed and wandered so many times in the past you can't believe this church is still standing with you in it? Did you barely make it here today because your soul is so overwhelmed with sorrow? Look up here. At the cross. Jesus died for your wanderings. Look at the altar like you've never looked before. From this very place the body and blood of Jesus will be served. You are forgiven. No doubts. Listen over here. Jesus lived. For you. Jesus died. For you. Jesus rose. Mary's sorrow was gone when she saw Jesus. Your sorrow is gone when you see the resurrected Jesus. Jesus invites us, "come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Jesus takes the wandering back to his Word, the straying back to our Savior's Sacraments. These walls are talking. "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" They say. These walls are screaming, "Forgiveness! For you! No doubts!" Amen.