

I.N.I.

19th Sunday after Pentecost
Oct. 3, 2010
Ezra 3:1-13

In Christ Jesus, the One Foundation of the Church, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What a joyous time it must have been! It was dedication day. The foundation of the Temple had been laid. A special service was being held, with responsive singing and shouts of thanksgiving and praises to the LORD. Can this be the same Israelite people who were carried away into captivity some 70 years earlier? It seems the exile had taught these people a very valuable lesson.

The remnant who returned put first things first when they returned to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Before the captivity, the people's priorities were all turned around. They lived for themselves, they lived for this life only, they did what they wanted to do, they rejected the LORD God and worshipped the idols and images of other nations. But now 70 years later one of the first things this new generation of Israelites did was to set up an altar to the LORD Jehovah!---The Covenant God. Yes, this was the same God who had brought about their captivity as a punishment upon them for their wicked rebellion, but also this is the same God who had promised them release from captivity and salvation through the coming Messiah.

This was the 7th month of their religious calendar; the busiest month for the Old Testament Jew. The first day of the 7th month was the festival of Trumpets, which was their New Year's Day in the civil calendar. It is still celebrated today by the name Rosh Hashanah.

The 10th day of the month was the Great Day of Atonement, the day when special sacrifices were made for the sins of the people and the one day of the year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. This, of course, was not celebrated in the same way as in the past for the temple had not yet been re-built.

On the 15th day of the month the week-long Festival of Tabernacles, also called the Festival of Booths began. During this time the people would live in tents or booths to commemorate the 40 years in the wilderness. This holiday was also the fall harvest festival. During this time the most elaborate sacrifices were to be offered. Burnt offerings, sin offerings, and offerings for the New Moon which marked the beginning of a new month. The people were so caught up in the excitement of worshipping the LORD that we are told **EVERYONE WILLINGLY OFFERED A FREEWILL OFFERING TO THE LORD.**

WOW! What an amazing turnaround for a people who only two generations earlier were carried away into captivity because of year after year of despising and rejecting the LORD and His Word.

But this was a new beginning. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua the LORD moved the hearts of the people to worship Him. It was a new beginning and a very exciting one!

Sadly only about 50,000 Israelites returned to Jerusalem, but it was 50,000 who wanted to return. Many others found that life in Babylon was very comfortable. Some probably became officials like Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego---others were no doubt enticed by the riches and the lifestyle in this heathen country and did not want to return. But those who did, did so out of a desire to return to their homeland and for many that also meant a return to the worship of the **LORD GOD JEHOVAH!** And so the foundation was laid!

This morning we are studying the first part of the book of Ezra which tells about the first portion of

the building of the temple. Next week we will hear from the prophet Haggai concerning the second phase of the building process. This first phase was filled with eager hearts ready and willing to give of their time, talents and treasures for the LORD'S house. In fact they were so zealous that the first thing they did even before they began to rebuild the temple was as we said earlier build an altar in order to worship the LORD. Within a half a year the foundation of the temple was laid.

Our text clearly shows that it was not the work of a few; but it was the work of many that brought about this accomplishment. Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the priests, the Levites, and all of the people who had come out of the captivity began to work, with the Levites overseeing the work.

When the foundation was laid a special service of thanksgiving and praise was held. The priests in their temple apparel blew their trumpets, and the Levites played the cymbals and sang praises to God. All of the people with loud voices gave a great responsive shout of praise to the LORD for all that He had done for them and through them.

But as we see in our text there were a few who were not so happy. Some priests and Levites, some of the old men who had seen the old temple of Solomon wept when they saw the temple foundation being laid. They wept with a loud voice! It could be because this new temple would be nothing like the old one in beauty and grandeur; it would not be as big, no where near as glorious or grand in architecture and finery. This caused sorrow and tears. But those tears could also have been tears of sorrow over what had happened, tears of remorse over sins that caused all of this mess in the first place. The rest of the people, the majority of them, shouted for joy and there was such a loud noise of the people both crying and shouting that our text says **"THE SOUND WAS HEARD AFAR OFF."**

I couldn't help but think of the beginning of our synod and the beginning of so many congregations that make up the CLC when I read this text. Some of you, or your parents or grandparents were brought out of a captivity; a captivity in an organization that had fallen into false teaching. Reading from chapter 11 of Pastor David Lau's book "Out of Necessity—A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession" we see that many of these newly formed congregations had to rebuild. Even though there wasn't much to start with there was a joy, a zeal and a desire to get that foundation laid. The first thing that was done was to find a place for worship. Just like the Israelites of old, worship was first and foremost in importance.

Some congregations met in homes, others in a funeral chapel, theater and a bank basement. Still others met in school auditoriums and rented halls, an Armory and YMCA . As time went on property was bought, church buildings and parsonages were built. No doubt many who had come out from their former fellowship with much larger churches looked upon their new church facilities with sadness in their hearts. They were simple buildings, nothing in comparison to the churches they came from, no where near as big, no where near as grand or glorious. Yet there was joy and a happiness that filled the hearts of the people.

And just like the Israelites, most everyone pitched in, everyone got involved. In some cases that meant helping to clear land, building, painting, doing electrical wiring, leveling and seeding the grounds. And when these churches were dedicated there was a shouting and singing of voices that carried out over the neighborhood, shouts of joy and thanksgiving over what the Lord had accomplished with so few. Singing responsively; **O GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD; FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER!**

How was all of this accomplished? It was because the foundation that was laid was Jesus Christ and His Word. The Israelites rejoiced when the foundation was completed, but their real foundation was the **LORD JEHOVAH**. Their real foundation was the **OLD TESTAMENT** prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah who would redeem them; set them free from sin, death and hell. All they were really doing was preparing for that glorious moment when the Christ would come into this world to

save all of mankind.

Our congregation's foundation is the same--Jesus Christ. The only difference is we proclaim the fulfillment. Our church is not built upon cement, or upon its pastor or church leaders and officers, or you members but upon the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ and His unchanging, infallible WORD. It was that Word that called our fathers and us out of the darkness of sin and unbelief; that filled our hearts with the message of salvation through our Savior's perfect life, sacrificial death and resurrection. It was that Word that led you to come before your Lord's altar and promise your faithfulness to Him till death through the power of the Holy Spirit in your confirmation. It is that Word that led us to confess our sins earlier this morning and that will lead us to the Lord's Supper to partake of our Savior's very body and blood in and with the bread and wine for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. It was that same Word that moved you to give of your time, talents and treasures over the past years in service to your Savior and it is that same Word that will continue to move you and me to come help spread the Good News of Jesus, clean the buildings, build and restore, serve and visit, teach and preach, pray and sing, give of our offerings of hands and hearts in worship to our Savior to the glory of His name and for the welfare of His kingdom.

It is now 38 years since the founding of this our congregation---Peace Thru Christ. Is there that same kind of zeal and eagerness? Is there that same kind of freshness and joy in serving? Is there that oneness where all chip together to work and give and live for their LORD even as Jesus lived and died for every one of us? Only each of us can answer that question for ourselves?

Next Sunday we'll find out what happened with the Israelites zeal and eagerness in their building the temple.

If we find that over the years something has been lost, that our zeal and joy and desire to serve the LORD and give and live for our Savior has eroded since we first were brought to saving faith, then we pray that this text serves to renew each of us; to rededicate ourselves to our Lord's mission in serving others, in bringing the Good News of salvation to all people, in deepening our own understanding of that Word through our study of it in Bible Class, Sunday School and home devotions, and in truly being one with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, loving and caring for each other.

It is the Lord through His Word who has led us here to Peace Thru Christ, who led our forefathers to found this congregation upon Himself and His Word, and has led us to continue to see to it that this congregation's **ONE FOUNDATION** never changes—Jesus Christ crucified and risen again for all of sinful mankind; a free gift of forgiveness, everlasting life and salvation given to us in His Word.

We too can then raise our hearts and voices and shout songs of joy and thanksgiving to our Savior-God who saved us from our miserable, lost, sinful condition.

O GIVE THANKS, WITH HEARTS AND HANDS AND VOICES...TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS MERCY DOES ENDURE THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER.

Amen