

35th Annual Cowtown Worship Service

”Honor the Builder”

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1-6

Sermon for June 6, 2010

Welcome to worship at the Presbyterian Church of Wichita. It’s wonderful to see so many new faces this morning. I know it took a special effort for those of you who had to cross the river—those of you who live west of Wichita town. We rejoice that a company has been formed to bridge the river. They are currently raising \$27,000 to build the bridge which to be completed by February 1 next year. On September 27 many of us attended the ground breaking for the construction of the Wichita and Southwestern Railroad, which will connect Wichita to the main line at Newton. The continued growth of Wichita confirms our vision that it will become a great city on the plains.

God has blessed our ministry here. Only two years ago, there were few indications of success—only 9 buildings, no organized town or government. The land was still officially Osage Indian Territory. When the Rev. Timothy Hill first approached me about coming to Wichita to establish a new church, I was fearful that I might not succeed. I think my wife Ella thought I was a little crazy taking on such a task. She was about to give birth to our daughter, so I had to leave her behind in Emporia, where we had a comfortable home. Upon arriving here I was able to file a claim for 160 acres upon which we built a cabin. We’ve enjoyed so much the company of William Finn, whose claim adjoins ours. The misfortune of losing our cabin in a fire was a loss to us and to Bro. Finn, as he had left his valuables with us for safekeeping. The risk of fire is great. The smoky sky indicates that there is fire out there on the prairie even now. Bro. Little informs us that Robert Lawrence is on his way to Neponset, Illinois, to teach this coming winter term. Bro. Lawrence has communicated that Chicago has nearly burned to the ground. A great fire started on October 9 and has swept through much of the city. We should pray for those who have suffered loss of life, home, and business.

Please join me in prayer:

On this day that you have made, O God, be with those who have suffered great loss, whether they be here on the prairie or in the great city of Chicago. May we rest secure in your care this day and always.

And now “May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.” Amen

Let us turn to God’s word for direction and inspiration. You heard read earlier the scripture for this morning’s sermon. Let me lift out the sermon text.

Hebrews 3:3-4

For this man (Christ Jesus) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.

For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

While I could spend much time on the rest of this passage, I want to focus on the builders of this house—the house of worship for this congregation.

Prior to our building and occupying this structure, we worshiped in the old military dugout during the winter of 1869-70. Mr. Finn had located the dugout to use for his weekday subscription school. On Sundays it became the place of worship for the nascent Presbyterian congregation. The first Sunday school was held in the dugout on November 7, 1869. I marvel at the faithfulness of those worshippers. No one lived near the dugout. Some drove several miles to attend services. By spring, we moved out and began holding services in unfinished store buildings being built over in Greiffenstein’s development along Main Street. And who can forget those services held above the livery stable during the summer of 1870? How we longed for a building of our own, dedicated solely to worship!

Because of the lack of building materials and financial resources, we were unable to begin building right away. In fact, by the time we were ready to build, the lots selected were no longer suitable. Within a few months, the town center, originally Mr. Munger’s townsite on Waco, was no longer the center of the settlement. Mr. Greiffenstein was

quite a promoter and developer and within one year the town center shifter over toward Main Street and Douglas Avenue. We are grateful to God for the gift of our present lots by Eli Waterman.

Back to our text: Those builders to be honored today include the 13 charter members—13 hardy souls who committed themselves to follow God’s leading by joining together to form a Presbyterian church here in the newly formed Wichita town. We actually organized before the city of Wichita was incorporated, but we saw great promise here in this place. It seemed inevitable that a great city would grow up here at the junction of the two rivers.

I’ve already mentioned William Finn, Wichita’s first schoolteacher and surveyor. Others included John Marion Steele, Edward Peck and family, B. S. Dunbar, Wm. Gill, R. M. Bowes, Ella Boggs, Lucy Greenway, Amy Sayles, and William Smith.

John Steele and Edward Peck were elected as the first elders with Steele serving as Clerk of Session.

In this short period of a year and a half, several have moved on. Fortunately, others have arrived to take their places. During 1870-71, we added Thomas Lee Nixon, Fred Martsolf, Winfield Scott Corbett, Robert E. Lawrence, and William C. Little. No one can measure the contribution these have made in establishing this church on a strong foundation. Earlier this year, Ann Cook and her daughter Helen were received into membership. Sister Ann has contributed the pulpit Bible and candles for our services.

The population of Wichita has grown from 100 in 1869 to over 650. Today our church has 29 members. As many as 100 attend the Sunday school. Robert Lawrence has served faithfully as Sunday school superintendent. The Sunday school meets every Sunday after the morning service. Often this little church is filled to capacity. A few times late-comers have gone back home because there was no place to sit. We can already see the day when it will be necessary to build a much larger house of worship.

The people of this congregation enjoy each other. The social gatherings help form a bond among the people. Who can forget the Christmas festival here last Dec. 23rd? Even though the weather was inclement, we raised approximately \$100 to help buy bricks for the chimney. A good oyster supper seems to bring everyone out despite the

cold weather. Everyone rejoiced at the completion of the painting of this building in May. The next week we gathered for an ice-cream festival to help raise money to complete the building. Lucy Greenway's ice cream is always a highlight at our socials.

Two other highlights worth mentioning are the birth of a ten-pound son to Mr. and Mrs. John M. Steele. And Mr. Martsof is to be congratulated on the completion of the seats for this room in which we worship.

While we give credit to these builders of the church, our text today reminds us that Christ Jesus is the most highly honored of builders. Besides honoring Christ as the builder of the house, we acknowledge God as the builder of everything. Whatever we mortals have accomplished in building God's kingdom here on earth must be attributed to God, the master builder.

It is in this spirit of thanksgiving that we partake of the Lord's Supper today. As this sacrament is offered today, raise your prayers of thanksgiving to God that He has built you and His Church and has enabled His servants to raise a church in Wichita to minister to all peoples. AMEN

Written by Gary M. Huffman Archivist, and delivered as the Rev. Wilberforce K. Boggs.

Closing Prayer: offered by Deacon Michael Steele

O God, with gratitude, we gather to celebrate the enduring faith, fortitude and inspiration of Ellen Boggs, (my grandfather) John Marion Steele, Edward A. Peck, Margaret S. Peck, Annie P. Peck, Mary E. Peck-Smith, William Smith, Lucy Greenway, B.S. Dunbar, William H. Gill, Robert Bowes, William Finn, and Amy Sayles. We rejoice comforted that these thirteen brave Presbyterian's chose to witness your love and compassion to all who sought hope and promise on the changing Kansas prairie.

O God, when our world tempts us with needless attractions; or when we are inconvenienced by man or machine; or when we are called to endure discomfort, pain, and suffering, remind us that it is through the sweat, blood, and tears of Jesus Christ, that the charter members resisted their temptations. Strike a chord within us that proclaims it is the same love of Jesus Christ and scripture that strengthens us. This is our inheritance, visible in the form of this hand crafted and hallowed edifice with its enduring echo of sermons preached.

O God, this day, you have sent and we have felt your Holy Spirit, which transformed us into a generation of living witnesses. We pray that you grant us health and prosperity that we, filled with the pioneering zeal of early Wichita, may offer support and encouragement to those less fortunate than us.

O God, open our minds, our hearts and ears to your will for our lives.

Now, with a moment of silence for reflection, let us then pray for God's blessing.

Benediction:

Almighty God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, you assemble within this old church. May you, God, the Father, fill us with the blessings of heaven; and may your Son, Jesus, the Word made flesh free us from every bond of sin. May you, Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dwell within us and grant us joy, peace and happiness. May we live with you forever in the company of your saints; as I bless you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.