

Encountering God – From Tents to Basilicas

The Book of Genesis tells us that humankind's first encounters with God occurred in the Garden of Eden. After the fall, these encounters shifted to altars made of stones and to large tents (or tabernacles) where the Ark of the Covenant was housed.

After the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, it seemed appropriate to build a temple. Not just any temple, but *The Temple*, built by King Solomon in the 10th century BC. This first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Herod the Great rebuilt a second temple in the years just prior to the birth of Jesus. The Roman armies destroyed it in 70 AD.

The concept of the temple evolved into the synagogue, which literally means “gathering.” When Jesus walked through the cities and towns of Palestine, he frequently visited synagogues.

In the Book of Acts we read how early Christians met not only in the temple but more and more in private homes. In fact, both the Last Supper and the events of Pentecost took place in the upper room of a home in Jerusalem.

In cities like Rome, early Christians met in catacombs or underground burial places. These places were large and relatively safe.

Over time, as the Christian faith began to grow, larger and more permanent facilities were deemed necessary. Christians looked at the halls that housed the monarchs of the time and decided to build similar facilities, call basilicas, or “hall of the King.” Today, many great houses of worship are similar to the basilicas of days past.

The places where we worship God have continued to evolve. These evolutionary changes are driven by practical considerations and by changes in culture. Today, we see an enormous variety in the “places where people encounter God”... from small meeting houses to facilities that once housed NBA basketball games and rock concerts. Change is part of our historical and religious heritage.

When I was in the United Kingdom for my sabbatical several years ago, I observed a number of churches that resisted change, clung tightly to the past, and seemed to be dying. This is not our tradition. We Presbyterians think of ourselves as “reformed and always reforming.” Our God calls us on a journey of faith where change and growth are expected.

While change is an integral part of the life of faith, it is important to realize that the fundamental truth of Jesus Christ and his Gospel is UNCHANGING. As we look to our facilities and activities here at Lake Grove Presbyterian Church, this unchanging truth of the Gospel must always be at the heart of our ministry.

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Though the center and object of our worship are still the same, the places where the people of God have gathered to actively participate in worship have changed over the years. In fact, these changes have helped spread the Gospel to “the ends of the earth.”

Lord, as we consider changes to the space where this people of faith gather to worship, help us to remember how much places of worship have changed over the centuries. Guide us with Your wisdom! We want to do Your work. Help us create that welcoming space where Your children may come and worship... may come and encounter You. Amen.

Bob Sanden