

Sermon for the 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
November 2, 2008

Scriptures: Isaiah 6:1-7  
Revelation 5:6-14

## “The Church: God’s Throne and Our Sanctuary”

The title for today’s sermon, “The Church: God’s Throne and Our Sanctuary,” was the title of the morning sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. George S. Mott, on the first Sunday in this sanctuary, November 4, 1883. The dedication of the sanctuary had taken place the prior Thursday, November 1. We do not have copies of remarks made at that time.

Though I have used the title of that first sermon for the title of my sermon, you should be happy to learn that I have chosen not to simply repeat that sermon – since it would run to forty to forty-five minutes. I have used it however to provide some shape and direction for my sermon.

Last Saturday, October 25, Session met with Greg Albert, the Associate Executive Presbyter of New Brunswick Presbytery to review the results of two surveys we had done, one with the congregation, and one with committee members. The latter, that with committee members, was a survey provided by Natural Church Development. It seeks to indicate church strength in eight important areas, and to identify places where the church can best use its energies to improve its health.

One of the questions that produced a rather surprising result read: “I can easily explain why I come to the worship service.” We had our lowest score on that particular question. For whatever reason,

few respondents indicated ability to do that. It is rather shocking if we do not have a clear idea about why we come to worship. So let's start there.

We come to worship in this place, because we acknowledge that God is our Supreme Ruler, and this is a particular place for affirming that, and has been for 125 years. We come to this sanctuary week in and week out to profess that our only God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay homage to God, to celebrate God's rule, to teach that rule to our children through worship, and to reinforce our attention to God's rule as we enter a new week of being bombarded by innumerable voices and temptations that would seek to supplant that rule.

So, first and foremost, this sanctuary is dedicated to the worship of God, and all that we do here is directed toward God. Nothing done in this space should take precedence to that purpose. This place represents **God's** throne for this congregation. Worship that is fitting for God must take place here. Our attention is to be redirected toward God each week as we gather in this place.

We will each find ourselves in many different places in this week to come, all of them having their importance for us, but if we are to truly know our appropriate place in them, we will need to have acknowledged and been reminded of God's appropriate place of sovereignty for us by having gathered in this place.

That is point number one. Historical sermons often had three points, so I will accommodate myself to that tradition today. Point number one is: the church must remain **God's** throne. Point number two is: the church is God's **throne**.

In his sermon, that first Sunday morning, Dr. Mott shared some thoughts on the glory of this structure itself. While Protestants tend to refrain from overly elegant and decorative places of

worship, there ought to be a positive relation between the quality of **our** homes and dwellings, and that of God's house, God's **throne**. Where we have prospered and live comfortably, the church building should reflect the same kind of care and appointments that we demand for ourselves and our houses. Dr. Mott said that morning: "It never entered their thoughts (the planners of this sanctuary) to construct an elegant building. Their desires and purposes were to erect a commodious, comfortable house, which should replace one that was too small.... We have built better than we expected."

It is clearly our responsibility, we who have inherited this place, to continue to value and preserve it in a manner that bears witness to our recognition that this is God's throne. If we are careful about the appearance and furnishing of our homes, we should be even more so with regard to this place. It will not be enough to simply rejoice in the gifts of our ancestors, we are called to maintain and improve this house and its furnishings, or we will lose the sense that this is God's **throne**.

Thirdly, this place is our sanctuary. Here I do turn to the specific words of Dr. Mott: "May the Lord of Hosts fill this house with glory.... Your sons and your daughters shall be led up to holiness and heaven, through the ministrations of this sanctuary. Some of you here to-day are unreconciled to your heavenly Father; you will yet in this house consecrate yourselves to Him. Here you will record vows, when your babes are presented for holy baptism. Here you will sit around the Communion Table to celebrate the love of a dying Redeemer. Here you will render thanksgiving for restored health, for deliverance from danger, for the spared lives of kindred and family. To all one day this will be a sad house, for you will find a vacant seat. Sabbath after Sabbath the widow will sit solitary, and the husband go home without her who has leaned upon his arm. Orphan children will weep here, and the fatherless, and the motherless. But on all occasions, whether of joy or grief,

God will be here, for this is *His throne*, and the place of *our sanctuary*.”

We celebrate generations of faithful servants of Jesus Christ who have provided us this sanctuary. We recommit ourselves to care for it, to hold it in honor, and to continue to seek God’s face in this place. Here we are cleansed to live a new life, here we are fed with heavenly food, here we are embraced within the company of saints, here we enter God’s courts and bow at God’s throne. May our song be joyful, our prayer be fervent, and our commitment be unwavering, until we are joined with the saints around God’s heavenly throne.

Thanks be to God!