

Building Dedication Worship Service *A Dwelling Place for Justice and Newness*

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey
May 15, 2022

Let us pray: All things belong to you, O God. This day, this world, this community, this place, these people with whom we are gathered. All things belong to you. Teach us to hold everything with lightness of heart and without any fear, in order that our hands may always be open to share the gifts that we have and to receive the gifts of others, so that your beloved community may grow. Through Christ, we pray. Amen.

What a day! It is always true when we say, “This is the day that the Lord has made,” but there are some days when you can just feel it. Today is one of those days.

On behalf of the Session, the pastors, the staff, and the entire congregation, I want to thank all of you for being here today. Those of you who are members and active friends here, *[to Gary, Debbie, Emily]* those of you who have served this congregation with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love as pastors and as staff, those of you who are neighbors and friends – from National Capital Presbytery and Fairfax County and beyond, those of you who were partners with the church in the renovation project – to all of you, Lewinsville would not be who it is without you and your friendship, your partnership, and your love. This renovation project would not have been possible without your astonishing generosity, your investment, and your commitment.

Friends, there is so much to celebrate today. We are celebrating Lewinsville’s 175th anniversary as a congregation here at the corner of Chain Bridge Road and Great Falls Street, remembering how through thick and thin, in times of delight and times of challenge and times that were a mix of both, Lewinsville has sought to bear witness to the God of mercy, justice, kindness, and love in this place. We have come through a renovation project ... in the midst of a global pandemic, in which our Capital Campaign Committee, led by Roland McElroy, did such remarkable work that we have completed the project without having to take out a mortgage. Because this is how Lewinsville has done it before, we can lose sight of what a tremendous blessing this is. That is a really big deal. There is so much to celebrate.

And now, Lewinsville’s mission and ministry have the opportunity to move into and inhabit this renovated space. As we do that, our three texts today provide a guide for us. They inspire us to see to it that our facility will be a place of hospitality, a place of justice, and a place of newness. Psalm 84, which we have experienced in both the spoken word from Pastor Emily and in song from our choir, rejoices in the loveliness of the Lord’s dwelling place. This is a temple psalm, and being in the temple was a joy,

every bit as much as being in our new building. But according to Psalm 84, the temple was not just an architectural wonder; it was a place of hospitality for the humblest of creatures. “Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself. [Note that here it is not for the mighty eagle, but for the ordinary sparrow and swallow.] Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.” The temple, the church, our own homes, none of these are for us to keep to ourselves. They are intended to be places where the praise of God has a home, and a place of hospitality for the little ones of the earth.

The temple’s ministry of hospitality resonates with Micah 6:8’s declaration of the purposes of God for all of us, which Pastor Gary read. “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice. To love kindness. To walk humbly with your God.” Along with Matthew 25, Micah 6:8 functions for so many believers as a north star, guiding our attention to God’s core expectations of us that are to organize and shape our individual lives, and the life of the congregation. Justice, kindness, humility. Those are the things that God is calling the church to pursue and cultivate.

And all of that is because “we are pilgrims on a journey,” we are going somewhere. And the place where we are going is Revelation 21, which Pastor Debbie read for us. We are on our way to that day when God will wipe away every tear, when death will be no more, when mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for God is a God of newness. There will necessarily be continuity between our past and where God is leading us into the future, but our future will not simply repeat the past. The church is never a museum for the way things used to be. The church is called to be a laboratory for the new things Jesus is making, the church is called to be a garden for the new fruits of grace that God is growing, the church is called to be an entrepreneurial community where we follow the Holy Spirit in experimenting with new ideas for hospitality and steadfast love, the church is called to be a place of healing where the wounds of broken people like you and me are tended to, the church is called to be an alternative community of mercy and humility in our world of violence and fear. As the song says, “In the bulb, there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree. In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free.”

Friends, God is making all things new. Right in front of our eyes. And we get to participate in that redemptive healing. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Let us pray: Down through the ages, you have led your people by pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night. Grant us eyes to see and ears to hear, O God, that we may discern your leading in our own lives, and grant us courageous hearts that we may have the necessary nerve to follow where you are leading us. Through Christ we pray, Amen.