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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Beyond These Walls: Community *Acts 2:42-47*

Did you know that since 2000 your church has been the central emergency shelter for our community? In times of need or catastrophe, our gymnasium becomes a place of refuge where 100 people can sleep and eat and be safe; more if the emergency is dire. Only problem is, we had no emergency power. Well, on the Monday after Easter, we dedicated a new 125 KW generator that will take care of that. This was the dream of one of the pillars of our church, Don Lee, who, along with Dan Griswold, worked tirelessly to make this happen. Our deacons and elders provided a gift of \$50,000 which was matched by Puget Sound Energy and topped off by gifts from the City, Rotary, Pen Light, and other community members.

I *really* didn't want to come to a dedication ceremony the day after Easter, but I'm so glad I did. Representatives from agencies across the county, including three city council members who told me they had never set foot in our building, were able to hear me say that this shelter and our contribution to the generator represent our commitment to serve our citizens regardless of background, religion or race. I went on to say, "I think 'shelter' is a great job description for a church. We ought to be a place of safety in times of danger and catastrophe. With this generator, that will be literally so."

But you need to know this: That generator—big as it is—is not big enough to power the entire church. The primary purpose is to power up the gymnasium and other key areas in the church so that if, God forbid, we ever have a catastrophe, anyone in this community will know that they can come to Chapel Hill as a place of safety and warmth. In other words, this generator doesn't really benefit us too much, but that wasn't why we did it. We did it to care for the community beyond our walls.

I can hardly think of a better illustration for the initiative we launch today: Beyond These Walls: Making Disciples that Make History. When you hear the words "beyond these walls," to what am I referring? *These* walls! The walls of our wonderful campus, built up over 55 years and particularly over the last 30 years. Thirty-seven-and-a-half acres, 114,000 square feet. It is a prominent and dominant landmark in our community, sitting as we do upon this hill. And the Lord has allowed us to put these walls to good use, hasn't he? Just guess how many separate bookings we had for our facility last year? Over 17,600! That is astounding! Just *try* to find a parking space on a weeknight and you know what I'm talking about. "These walls" have been a gift to our church *and* to our community.

But these walls have never been a citadel behind within which we hide. They have always been a base camp where we have trained, refreshed, re-supplied and sent our people back out on mission. And now, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our gymnasium and the 20th anniversary of our sanctuary, it is time for us to look to the next 5 to 10 years. The vision I have for Chapel Hill's next chapter of life can be summed up as "**beyond these walls.**" And for our text we turn to Acts. For 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus ministered to the people. Then he ascended back to heaven. Before he did, he instructed his disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for God's promise.

So they did. They gathered in a room in Jerusalem—maybe the same room where they shared the Last Supper—and waited and prayed and waited and prayed and waited. After ten days, on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus kept his promise; he sent his Holy Spirit upon them with power. They were given the ability to speak in tongues they had never learned, and, with Peter’s great Pentecost sermon, the book of Acts is launched. **The people who had been waiting behind the walls** of that upper room were released in the power of the Spirit. And the world would never be the same.

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, offers a description of what that early community of history-making disciples looked like. I believe we find in these words a call to our future. Listen:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

When Luke describes the early church, he does so almost breathlessly. He uses the word “and” 16 times. Every verse starts with the word “and.” “They did this *and* this *and* this *and* this *and*...” “*They were devoted to apostolic teaching and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayer. And they were reverent and joyful and generous and worshipful.*” When the Holy Spirit came upon them behind the walls of that upper room, he created a culture of community and worship and learning and compassion and generosity and *love*. The early believers didn’t decide to do these things. It was what happened when the Holy Spirit took hold of his people. *It still is.*

But this is essential to understand: **The early disciples made history not because of what took place behind the walls of that upper room but because they began to move beyond those walls and into the community and into the world.** They worshipped in homes, yes, but they also worshipped in public at the temple. They sold some of their belongings and took care of their own, yes, but they also reached out and cared for *any* who had need outside the walls of their church. They devoted themselves to private study and worship, yes, but they preached in public and thousands of people were drawn into the church. They enjoyed fellowship with each other, yes, but we read an astounding statement in this litany: they found favor with *all* the people. **And ultimately, as the story of Acts unfolds, they moved beyond the walls of that upper room, beyond the walls of Jerusalem and out into the world to share with all the life they had discovered in Jesus Christ.**

My point is: history-making disciples *start* behind walls of the church where they learn about Jesus, learn to worship, learn to care for each other, learn to be generous, **learn to love**. But disciples only kick a dent in history when, having learned those things, they move beyond those walls and out into their community and into their world.

We are at a watershed moment in our life as a church. There have been several of these in our history. Fifty-five years ago when 96 charter members purchased 10 acres of land—way more land than they could ever use—way up here in the boonies! And on this land they built a 250 seat sanctuary—way more than they would ever need! That was a watershed moment; a courageous one. Twenty-five years later, when we had outgrown that sanctuary, we decided *first* to build a gymnasium because there was not a single place in town for kids and families to play—no YMCA, no Boys and Girls Club, no place for basketball or volleyball or just messing around. So, Chapel Hill became the community gathering place and worshiped in the squeaky chairs in that gym for three years as part of the price we paid. How many remember those sweet, squeaky days?

Another watershed came when we finally built a sanctuary twice the size of our congregation and offered it to the community as a gathering place for graduations, symphonies, musicals, community-wide funeral services, something no other place in Gig Harbor could accommodate. There *still* is no other place like it in our town. Once again, it was more than we needed, but it wasn't more than the community needed. So we sacrificed, built it, and offered it as a gift to Gig Harbor.

Now we are at a new watershed, a new opportunity for us to be generous, **and this may be the weirdest giving initiative we have ever launched. Because we don't need one thing more. We have enough.** We aren't going to build another building. We aren't going to buy another piece of land. We aren't going to launch a great new internal initiative. I'm not going to ask you to consider a sacrificial gift so that Chapel Hill can add to our campus, add to these walls. **No!** We believe the time has come to *give ourselves away* to our community as never before. To love Gig Harbor as never before.

There is no church in Gig Harbor that has been more blessed than Chapel Hill Church over our 55 years. Millions of dollars have been given to us. Thousands of hours have been donated to us. Thousands have entrusted the spiritual care of their family to us. We have experienced the kindness and generosity of this community as no other church ever has. Now it's our time to give back.

And the good news is we have identified \$600,000. A \$600,000 annual annuity that we can invest in ministries that go beyond these walls. There's one teensy hiccup. Right now, that \$600,000 is servicing our remaining debt of \$5 million. But if we could be heroically generous, like what we saw in Acts 2. If each of us could sacrifice and, over three years, eliminate that debt, it would free up \$600,000. Per year. Every year. Forever. Not for ourselves. We have enough. But to pour into serving and caring for and loving Gig Harbor as we have never done before.

Today, we begin the journey: **"Beyond These Walls: Making Disciples that Make History."** For the next few weeks, I am asking you to buckle up with me and go for a ride. Be brave. Don't hide! Come faithfully and join this journey. And here's the question we are going to ask: What would it mean for Chapel Hill—which already has so much—to give itself away as never before? To invest in our community as never before? To move beyond these walls as never before—in such a way that even the most resolute pagan who would never darken the doors of this sanctuary would say, *"I don't believe a thing they believe, but I would weep for Gig Harbor if Chapel Hill were not here."*

We have two goals for this initiative. The first and most important goal is this: 100% participation. My prayer is that every person who calls Chapel Hill "home" will commit sacrificially to this cause. For some that sacrifice will be a six figure gift over three years. We already have a few of those committed! But for others who have less, a few hundred dollars a year might represent genuine sacrifice. Regardless of the size of the gift, my prayer is that every single person and family will participate. In fact, if someone were to walk in tomorrow with a check for \$5 million, we would still complete this journey. We'd take the check, but we'd still complete this journey. Because every one of us needs to feel like we were a part of setting this church free to move beyond these walls.

And when I ask this, you need to know I am not asking you to do something that Cyndi and I are not committed to. We've been praying and talking about this for a long time. And God has led us to a commitment that will be for us, by far, the largest gift we have ever made to our church. One that will make my hand shake a little when I sign the pledge card. We have always given at least ten percent. We have supported every capital campaign. But we are as excited for the future of our church as we have been for our past and Cyndi and I want you to know that we are *all* in. And we invite you to join us.

So, 100% participation. And of course, the other goal is to raise \$5 million over the next three years, over and above our ordinary giving: which will go—every dime of it—to eliminate the remainder of our debt. I will never regret taking out our mortgage. The banks allowed us to build a facility that has served us and our community well for thirty years. So I am grateful to the banks. But I think we've paid them enough, don't you? In three years, I hope to make that last payment and then we will gather for a great celebration to burn our mortgage. But more importantly: we will free up \$600,000 every year in perpetuity to pour into our community as never before. To move beyond our walls as never before. To love people as never before.

Cyndi and I have a lot. More than enough. This is a time for us to share. Chapel Hill has a lot. More than enough. This is a time for *all* of us to share. And over the next weeks, I will flesh out what it looks like for us all to move "Beyond These Walls."

And I want to introduce your roadmap for this journey. We are calling it our Journey Guide. Every single one of you will receive one of these as you leave today. I would ask you to make this your constant companion in the weeks to come. You will want to take a close look at pages 8 through 10 where I describe in greater detail our vision for what we would do if we freed up \$600,000. Three key areas: Multiplying Lifegroups, Releasing Leaders and Loving Gig Harbor. What would it take to quadruple the number of professions of faith every year? What would it look like if we became a model within our denomination for training pastoral leaders—leaders that we send around the country and around the world? What would it look like if we invested our people and money into strategic partnerships with the Rescue Mission and Food Bank and WIC—partnerships that would change the landscape of Gig Harbor? I'm going to share what that might look like over the coming weeks, but this journal will give you a jump start.

Then each week, in a journey through Matthew, we will look at how Jesus trained and empowered disciples that made history. Please, bring this journal every Sunday. Take notes in it. Please, challenge your Lifegroup to set aside whatever you are studying right now and use the group materials you will find in each chapter. And finally, look for the section on "home dialogue." Please use these helps to guide you in conversations with your spouse and with your children. **This is our compass** for our journey together. Use it. Bring it to church. Sleep with it under your pillow! I pray that in a few weeks, these journals will be tattered and torn because they've gotten so much use!

Over the past weeks I've been speaking to groups of leaders in our congregation, people who not only want to support this initiative, but will make an advance pledge as an inspiration to the rest of their church. After one of our Vision Nights, one woman said this to one of our BTW leaders: "I came tonight because I felt I had to, but I knew I wasn't going to support this initiative, whatever the church needed more money for." But she went on to say how she was going home to discuss with her husband "how wrong she was;" that they needed to figure out how they could generously support this initiative to move beyond our walls and pour ourselves into our community. (By the way, if you want to be one of those advance pledgers and listen to my expanded vision for Beyond These Walls, I invite you to come tonight at 6:30 or Wednesday at 6:30.)

At those same Vision Nights, one of our leaders, Leonard Green, had these profound words to say: "When we pay off that \$5 million debt, there is no other entity—not the City, not the Country, Rotary or Kiwanis or the Chamber of Commerce or, for that matter, any other church—no other entity will be able to do what we will be able to do: invest over half-a-million dollars every year into this community. And every one of those dollars will go to the work of the Kingdom of God."

I couldn't have said it better. If you can't get excited about that kind of selfless vision—not for our gain or glory but for the sake of the city and love of Christ—well, I don't know how to help you. But the Holy Spirit does. So, take your Guides home, join us on this journey...and see what that Spirit will do in and through you.