

# Under Construction

## Nehemiah 4:1-2,16-17

Well friends, here we are in a new location, still with the same commission which our forebears first shouldered, the same community that we were called to and nurtured and instructed in. We are still St Paul's Box Hill Lutheran Church, just in a different location. And what a location it is! Not the lofty heights of Box Hill's business sector, but down in the more residentially-oriented dale of Riversdale Rd. A church under construction, full of hope, worshipping in a temporary space.



Saddened by the future demolition of Station St, it's rather ironic that we are knocking down some walls of a previous Christian community, St James Presbyterian, which later came part of the Uniting Church. Isn't it rather serendipitous that we continue the heritage of fellow believers who built and worshipped and witnessed to the gospel in this place? "Doers of the Word", they responded to God's leading to build here. And God built them from small beginnings in a humble small hall at the back of this property before building and moving into this space, and eventually completing the larger chapel which is the focus of the first stage of our building renovation.

Here we are currently in a building site, with construction work refurbishing and strengthening some old structures, as well as the demolition of other structures in preparation for some new building. That process will eventually include the demolition of this temporary worship space.

This is the reality of God's people... we are only ever on this earth worshipping in temporary places of worship. Just as we will eventually move on from this worship space into the renovated worship centre with its adjacent chapel; in time, all of us, temporal beings that we are (we are dust and to dust we will return), will move on to a new home in the promised kingdom of God. Leaving behind old bodies, we will be finally the completed work of God, able to stand holy and blameless in his presence.

By the work of the Holy Spirit, from our first hearing God's Word and our baptism into Christ, we have been under construction, as the Holy Spirit builds us into a house of living stones. St Paul describes this in his first letter to the Christian community in Corinth 3:9-11:

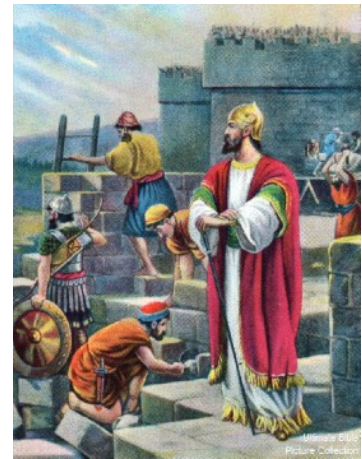
' - you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.'

The foundation stone of the St Paul's Lutheran Church in Station St included verse eleven – "Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." We thank God for the foundations of our faith and of this building, just as we were thankful for the foundations laid by founding members in 1952, their stewardship and subsequent building in partnership with Christ.

Now it is our turn, so how are we going to build? Isn't it in the same faith and love of God that is in us? And now, as we build each other up in love according to the Lord's command and by the Spirit's leading, we discover some hurdles. Though we don't find ourselves in the same situation as

those who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time, there are forces that would try to prevent our becoming what God wants us to become. Just as there are building blocks, there are blocks to building. Do we need to carry weapons as we build as they did?

The enemy seeks to sow fear in our hearts, speaking doubts into our ears concerning the soundness of the walls and the strength and longevity of what we are building. Some may mock us, suggesting the church has had its day and investment in this project is a futile waste of effort for a world that has 'outgrown' the church. Within our ranks we need to guard against a spirit of disunity and mistrust in the structures of the church; an anti-authority sentiment that says we don't need to pay attention to that synodical part of the foundation laid down by our forebears in union – certainly, the thesis of agreement articles concerning a male-only pastorate should be debated and challenged, but the confession of Christ Crucified, risen and ascended, and that free salvation is ours through Him alone is the bedrock of our faith and our sure foundation.



So, we build with confidence, choosing with care to follow God's instruction on being the people of God he has made; building up one another in love, bearing one another's burdens, dealing with each other graciously and patiently, always affording each other respect, putting the needs of others before our own. Standing strong in the power of God he gives his baptized people protection against the enemy. We are called to put on the full armour of God, so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. As it says in Ephesians 6:10, 11, prayer and the Word of God are the only the weapons we need as we work and build.

And just like the volunteers who worked so well together, taking different tasks suited to their abilities in tidying up and cleaning St Paul's house and the gardens next door, we use our varied gifts and find joy, and fellowship in working together. We are called to build each other up in love. This is a command from Christ who is not only the foundation but the head and perfecter of our faith. He empowers us to be true witnesses to the Father's love.

The most important tools we have are our ears and our hearts to receive the word of God. We are to be like Abraham who first received the promise and believed. We are sent into the world, not to condemn the world but declare salvation through our God who has given us his only Son for the life of the world.

We are the church – you and I. We are being loved and forgiven and built by God who gave his Son and raised him from the dead as a guarantee that he will complete his good work in us.

In the church of my youth, we used to sing a song that is now available as number 467 in *Together in Song*. It was called *I am the church, you are the church*.

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together.  
 All who follow Jesus all around the world. Yes, were the church together!  
 The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple,  
 the church is not a resting place; the church is a people.  
 We're many kinds of people with many kinds of faces,  
 all colours and all ages too, from all times and places.  
 And when people gather, there's singing and there's praying,  
 there's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying  
 – I am the church! You are the church!  
 I count if I'm ninety or nine or just a baby;

there's one thing I am sure about, and I don't mean maybe:  
I am the church! You are the church!

*Words Richard Avery and Donald March © 1972 Hope Pub. Co.*

We are the church, ever being renewed, ever on the move, ever seeking God's will. God is ever with us, in our midst, protecting and guiding strengthening, forgiving, healing, calling others by his Holy Spirit to faith. Constantly growing us and shaping us into His holy house of living stones. Yes, we are under construction. What a blessing it is to be God's workmanship!

In this season of Lent, we find ourselves in a new place, with many changes and challenges ahead. We don't know everything that is ahead, but we know it is the way of the cross to which Christ has called us. It will involve suffering, rejection and death of self.

We are dust, and to dust we shall return; but that's not the end of our journey. Christ, out of God's love for the world, put on human flesh and died for us, so that we would not be condemned. He carried the sins and punishment of all, and entered the grave in our stead and rose again so that we can join him in eternal bliss.



Throughout Lent we share in a somber contemplation for forty days, but we endure that time of starkness, and absence of the hallelujahs, with quiet hope and sureness of faith. Like Abraham who believed the promise and it was credited to him as righteousness, we also believe, and, with knowledge of how God has redeemed us and made us righteous, we wait. We wait, endure and even thrive with hope and joy sure of what is coming, sure that God's workmanship, his building, his wisdom and skill and faithfulness will be completed in us.

The church as it builds with love does not wear hi vis safety jackets to satisfy the legal regulations of this world; but we are to be highly visible so that the world sees us and our good works and gives glory to God our Father. How we come together and work in tidying up the grounds and interiors of St Paul's house, how we regularly and faithfully worship with joy even in humble circumstances like this simple hall, how we invite others, how we pray for the world and serve with the compassion and love of Christ – these things say who we are, but even more we shine as witnesses to the one who has loved us and sent his Son to save the world. Amen.