

Build the Best for the LORD

All of you receive these in the mail: offers for magazine subscriptions. The one that landed in my mailbox a few months ago was different. The sample magazine intrigued me and I thought, "This could be a magazine I actually take the time to read." The subscription price was right and now, 5 months into my subscription, I have learned a lot from *Consumer Reports*. For example, this issue from March 2008 lists the top TVs. With more television stations switching to high definition programming we've thought about replacing the old box for a flat screen LCD or plasma. *Consumer Reports* lists their Best Buys for a plasma TV: a 58inch Panasonic listed at \$5,000 and an LCD 52inch Sony listed at \$4,000. Those might be the best TVs my money can buy, but at those prices, we will be content with our old TV.

Consumer Reports is a useful magazine to help you, the consumer, make informed purchases and get the best for your money. And you do want the best for your home. When a guest walks in your pad for the first time, and notices the best furnishings and the upkeep, it says something about who you are. When a guest walks into a house of God, that house should say something about how we, the members of the congregation, feel... not about ourselves, but about our God.

When you look at a storefront church, there's not much you can do, but there are little things. If you noticed when you walked in, our purple awning is very dirty. A couple in our congregation has stepped forward to generously pay for a professional cleaning. Our sanctuary walls had been very plain. Some members saw an opportunity to draw the attention of the worshiper to the altar and cross with some new paint. The carpets were looking awfully gross. A member of the church took an afternoon to shampoo them. Another member has used her talents to visually remind us of the tools the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain our faith (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). Even in a storefront we can offer the best for the house of the Lord.

Our first lesson this morning is from the book of the prophet Haggai 1:1-11. Haggai lived during the time of Israel's history when the people returned home to Jerusalem, after living in exile in Babylon for 70 years. Because of many years of unfaithfulness the LORD allowed the unbelieving nation of Babylon to discipline his people. Nebuchadnezzar's army leveled the walls of the great city of David. They burned Solomon's glorious temple to the ground and took all of its gold as plunder. However, when the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they had misplaced priorities. The LORD sent the prophet Haggai to rebuke his people, "**Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled homes, while the [house of God] remains a ruin?**" The common Israelite was furnishing his home with cedar wood panels, which typically lined the palaces of kings and princes, while the temple of the LORD lie in a heap of rubble. If we rewind history about 400 years, we see skewed priorities from the builder of that first temple. 1Kings 6,7 tells us that King Solomon spent 7 years building the temple to the LORD, but he spent 13 years building his own home, so extravagant that it was designed to look like the Forest of Lebanon.

You and I are often like the Israelites and King Solomon, with whacked out priorities. There are times when we are that rich fool from Jesus' parable in Luke 12. Now, there's nothing wrong with building a new house or remodeling your existing home. There's nothing wrong with being a good steward of the wealth that your Provider has blessed you with and getting the best deal on the best products for your home. But what about for our God and his house? We spare no expense on us. There is no second thought on taking out a home equity line of credit. What about for a generous gift to the Lord and his new house? We finance new appliances. We max out credit cards to fill our homes. We'll do what it takes to keep our homes and to furnish them with the best. When it comes to God's house, why do we ask, "How can we do this the cheapest? Where can we cut costs? We can't afford this. We don't have that much to give." Yes, we want to be prudent and realistic. But when we discuss what we want for our new building...let me rephrase

that...what we want to build for our Lord and Savior, why would we go with the cheapest altar, pulpit and font, the cheapest seating for the sanctuary, the cheapest design? Do we have that same attitude toward our own homes? Do the words of the prophet Haggai cut at our hearts, "Is this a time for you sit in your paneled homes?"

Let me ask you this... What did your Heavenly Father have to offer you? What did he give? In Romans 8:32 the apostle Paul says, "**He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.**" Put yourself in the Father's place. If you had only one son, you would not give him up. Even if you had 10 sons you would not sacrifice one of them. Your Father in heaven spared no expense for you. He gave up his only Son. A better translation of the original Greek would be, *he handed him over for us all*. The Father handed over his only Son to his own chosen people, the Jews, who hated his Son so much that they sentenced him to death. The Father handed his Son over to the Romans, a mob of unbelieving, heartless soldiers, who mastered the art of inflicting pain on the human body. The Father handed his own Son over to Satan, who tormented Jesus' soul with temptation throughout his entire life, who whispered in his ear at the end, "Prove that you are the Christ and come down from that cross!" Finally the Father handed his own Son over to death. Why? **For us all.** So that you and I would not have to be handed over to Satan, to eternal torment and to death because of our sins. Jesus, the only Son of God, was handed over to death so that you might have life.

Paul adds this important truth, the truth upon which our faith and hope in heaven is founded, "**Christ Jesus died, more than that, he was raised to life.**" If Christ has not been raised, then what he did was for nothing. Because he is the living Savior, his work on our behalf satisfied the Father. Because he lives we know with certainty that we will live with him forever. Paul reminds us that although he accomplished salvation for us, the Son of God is still working for us, "**He is at the right hand of God**, the position of all power and authority, and with that power **he is also interceding for us.**" If Christ does not speak on our behalf, as our defense attorney, who will? Paul asks the question, "**Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?**" Satan raises his hand and says, "Ooh, ooh, me! Me!" He is all too willing to take on the roll of prosecuting attorney. He constantly accuses us before the Father, reminding him, "Did you know about their greed and their stinginess and their messed up priorities?"

Paul answers his question by saying, "**It is God who justifies. He is interceding for us.**" Jesus steps in and speaks on our behalf. He says to Satan, "You cannot bring these charges against them." He says to his Father, "You cannot count these sins against them. I paid for that sin of greed with my suffering. I endured hell for that offense of stinginess. I died for their act of selfishness with my act of selflessness. I have justified them. They are innocent."

The Father spared no expense to save you. He sent his only Son. The Son spared nothing to declare you innocent of sin. He gave his life in place of yours. How will we respond in thanksgiving? October 6, 2008 Wayne Baxmann from Cornerstone Consulting will visit our congregation to assist us in our pledge drive for the building fund. This firm makes it very clear that they are not about raising money, but about lifting up hearts, to show us how richly God has blessed us, so that we might reexamine our blessings, and make a three year commitment to give our best to the Lord. Remember I told you about the exiles who returned from Babylon and had whacked out priorities? Well, they straightened their lives out. The prophet Ezra in 2:68,69 records the gifts the leaders of the people brought to help rebuild the temple; 1,100 pounds of gold and 3 tons of silver. They generously gave the best to the construction of the LORD's house.

How will we respond to our Lord with our building design? In joyful response to the gospel message, (the promise of the Savior), King Solomon to built a temple lined with cedar, pine and olive woods, overlaid with gold, furnished with furniture of pure gold. He built the best for his LORD. The Father does not expect us to build the temple of Solomon, but not a van down by the river either; not a Crystal Cathedral yet not a pole barn. How will we build the best for the Lord? With a design that reflects how he gave us his best.

When a guest walks into our worship facility for the first time, their eyes will be drawn to a huge cross, a reminder of how our Savior gave us his best. Their eyes will then fall down to a huge, free standing altar, where Christ uses his body and blood to give to each of us personally the blessings he earned on the altar of Calvary. Near the altar the guest will see the pulpit, and recognize that the spoken Word is of utmost importance in this congregation, where God reminds us of how he gave us his best. And how can we best reflect the best of our Lord through the baptismal font? Will the font be placed in the entryway to the church, so that the first thing folks see as they walk into church is a reminder of how the Holy Spirit brought them into the Church of God through water and the Word? Or will it be placed in the middle of the front of the sanctuary for all to see?

Brothers and sisters, I'm excited about today's congregational meeting. The building committee has spent hours considering your opinions, researching other Lutheran congregations, taking advice from other WELS pastors, and now they ask that you will simply accept this proposal as the best facility we will build for our Lord Jesus. Today is a monumental day in the history of Faith Lutheran Church in Radcliff, Kentucky. Today we move forward with this proposal in which we will build the best for our Lord. We will give our best to our Lord in his new house, for he gave us his best so that we might live in his house forever. Amen.