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Building for the King: Commencement Address – Dordt College

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Building for the King: Commencement Address— Dordt College



by Erik Hoekstra

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you understand what he is doing. He fixes the drains and stops the leaks in the roof. You knew that those jobs needed doing, and so you are not surprised.

But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that does not seem to make any sense. What

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is he up to? He is building quite a different house from the one you know; he's adding a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace, and he intends to come and live in it himself.”

Dordt College Graduates of 2013, God is in the process of making you, and making all of creation with you, into someone and something magnificent—because he intends to come and live in us and with us, Himself—Forever.

You may recall this creative and insightful passage from C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, from a chapel I gave in October 2009, when most of you were freshman. Lewis uses the wonderful metaphor of building a house for our life in Christ. Today, each of you graduates will commence—you will begin—on the next phase of the restoration, remodeling, and redem

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You may recall the creative and insightful passage from C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* that I quoted in chapel in October 2009, when most of you were freshman. Lewis uses the wonderful metaphor of building a house for our life in Christ. Today, each of you graduates will commence;

you will begin the next phase of the restoration, remodeling, and redemption project that is your personal and individual “building for the King.”

You, as a building for the King?

Indeed, every one of you is a palace in progress for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This grace-filled truth, that God dwells with and in each of you, is a fundamental truth that changes everything.

That this same Jesus—who conquered sin and death, who took on human flesh and became “one of us,” who descended into Hell for you and for me, who rose again on the third day, who ascended into heaven and is presently awaiting the day of his promised reappearance—is interested enough in you to make you into a palace outfitted according to his kingly standards is a truth too large to get our heads around. But it is true, my friends, for each and every one of you. And it changes everything.

This building metaphor is not only an appropriate personal metaphor but also a cosmic metaphor. Just as God has a restoration, remodel, and redemption project going on within each of us, he also has a restoration, remodel, and redemption project going on within the entire creation. He is not only building individual palaces but also building an entire kingdom.

Not only does God call you to be a *building* for the King; God also calls you to be a *servant* of the risen King, staying redemptively busy and effectively working—building for the King!

You are a holy temple—a place for God to dwell. And you are a holy builder of his kingdom—the place where God dwells.

These dual realities, your individual growth and development as a saved child of Christ and your participation in the creation-wide process of working out the cultural implications of Christ’s atonement, have a world-changing impact on culture, art, healthcare, politics, education, and marriages.

To develop as a building and to develop as a builder are the two intertwined reasons you came to Dordt College. As president, on behalf of this community, we pray, with God’s help, we’ve served you well in both of these areas.

God dwelling with us—both God dwelling

with us as Lord of our lives and God dwelling with us as King of the kingdom of which we are citizens—is a powerful theme of Scripture and a calling worthy of you as a child of the King.

This reality is captured in one of the most beautiful names for Jesus—Immanuel, God with us.

But it wasn’t always that way. Let’s go back to the Old Testament this morning to hear a “Building for the King” story. I read from Exodus 31 and 36.

The story occurs just after God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and during the time God when was re-establishing his relationship with Israel as his covenant people.

The account actually begins in Exodus 25:8-9, when God tells Moses to “have them make a Sanctuary for me, and I will *dwelt* with them.” Over the next five chapters of Exodus, God plays architect, designing all the specific parts of the tabernacle. And then, they get to work:

Exodus 31:1-5 (The Message)

31 ¹⁻⁵ God spoke to Moses: “See what I’ve done; I’ve personally chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I’ve filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him skill and know-how and expertise in every kind of craft to create designs and work in gold, silver, and bronze; to cut and set gemstones; to carve wood—he’s an all-around craftsman.

⁶⁻¹¹ “Not only that, but I’ve given him Oholiab, son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to work with him. And to all who have an aptitude for crafts I’ve given the skills to make all the things I’ve commanded you: the Tent of Meeting, the Chest of The Testimony and its Atonement-Cover, all the implements for the Tent, the Table and its implements, the pure Lampstand and all its implements, the Altar of Incense, the Altar of Whole-Burnt-Offering and all its implements, the Washbasin and its base, the official vestments, the holy vestments for Aaron the priest and his sons in their priestly duties, the anointing oil, and the aromatic incense for the Holy Place—they’ll make everything just the way I’ve commanded you.”

Exodus 36:2-7 (The Message)

36 ²⁻³ Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab along with all whom God had gifted with the ability to

work skillfully with their hands. The men were eager to get started and engage in the work. They took from Moses all the offerings that the Israelites had brought for the work of constructing the Sanctuary. The people kept on bringing in their freewill offerings, morning after morning.

⁴⁻⁵ All the artisans who were at work making everything involved in constructing the Sanctuary came, one after another, to Moses, saying, “The people are bringing more than enough for doing this work that God has commanded us to do!”

⁶⁻⁷ So Moses sent out orders through the camp: “Men! Women! No more offerings for the building of the Sanctuary!” The people were ordered to stop bringing offerings! There was plenty of material for all the work to be done.

Enough and more than enough.

What a beautiful picture of God’s people, bringing their offerings of both building materials and building skills to build God’s house.

This Old Testament story is a microcosm of our calling now. Although I don’t think we’ll ever hear our Advancement Office send orders through the Alumni Network saying “Men and Women, no more offerings for the Science Building,” this story shows that all we have and all we are belong to God for the building up of his dwelling place. For Israel, the dwelling place was a specific building—the Tabernacle. For us, standing in the already but not yet victory of Christ, the dwelling place is the entire world—God’s kingdom here on earth.

I want you to focus, graduates, on the builders God called to lead the building of the tabernacle. They were two men, Bezalel and Oholiab.

Exodus tells us that the builders were “filled with the Spirit of God,” which doesn’t mean that Bezalel and Oholiab were great preachers or eloquent in offering prayers. “Filled with the Spirit of God” in this passage seems to mean two specific things. First, they were skilled as all-around craftsmen, and second, they were willing to put those skills to use for the glorious purpose of “building for the King.”

As you walk across this stage today, graduates, I ask you:

Your diploma certifies that you’re skilled—but are you willing?

Do you plan to use the gifts, talents, aptitudes that God has given you to build for the King?

Will you answer the call to put your skills—whether in agriculture or accounting, digital media or dentistry, mathematics or micro-biology—to work eagerly and always to “build for the King?”

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was the place where God met his people to “dwell” with them. God used these tabernacle builders to commune with his people. God continues to inspire and enlist builders today in his worldwide kingdom of the risen Christ.

That kingdom is the already but not-yet New Jerusalem, and it anticipates the promised coming of the new heaven and new earth described in the book of Revelation. We can catch glimpses now of that new heaven and new earth—God’s final building project—as we stay busy “building for King” in our daily work. Listen again to Scripture:

Revelation 21:1-5 (The New International Version)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

I always find it striking that God’s original building project, the Garden of Eden with the Tree of Life, reappears in Revelation, surrounded by the gleaming city. This tells me that God’s original creative work was meant to be continued through our work in creation. Even though our

work is imperfect, we still see the development and progression of Scripture from the Garden to the City. And, as we now stand here in the glorious wonder of the empty tomb, we no longer meet God only in the tabernacle:

Revelation 22:1-5 (The New International Version)
Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

So, graduates, as you leave this community today, I offer you three reminders:

Take what you've learned here at Dordt College as the foundation for your individual palace. Keep shaping yourselves daily, step by step, through the

power of the risen Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Shape yourself into a palatial "building for the King."

Take inspiration and direction from Bezalel and Oholiab, those Spirit-filled builders God called to lead the construction of his tabernacle. Be filled with the Spirit, knowing that we send you out today with effective skills to build for the King. Keep honing those skills, serving with a willing heart and ready hands.

And finally, while your head, hands, and heart stay busy on earth, have your eyes tilted heavenward, looking forward to that day when our faith shall be sight, the clouds will roll back as a scroll, the trumpet will sound, and we'll see the permanent "building of the King"—the Holy City. And then you, as a perfect palace, will be invited in to dwell with God and take your place in the final kingdom of the risen Christ.

As we, together, await that glorious day, I pray that through you graduates, and through us all, God's will may be done, and his kingdom may come, here on earth more and more each day as it already is in heaven. And may any glory that comes from our "building for the King" go not to us, but only, and always, and solely, as our college motto states, to God alone.