

150th Anniversary St. Marks, Watertown, WI. Jan. 18, 2004 Eph. 2:19-20
Pastor Dennis Kleist - Appleton, WI

Look at the Foundation of St. Marks!

Dear friends in Christ celebrating 150 years of God's grace and blessing,

Today is a wonderful day, isn't it? We are here today to praise, thank, and glorify God as we begin to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Marks. We're not here to celebrate the anniversary of this church building. This beautiful building was built in 1887&1888; and this wasn't even the first church building. That building was where the Parish Center is now, and it was built in 1854. When I was going to school here it was called the "Parish Hall".

No, today we're celebrating the 150th anniversary of a much more glorious structure than even this church building. We're celebrating the building of a spiritual "temple" which, as Paul says, **RISES AND IS JOINED TOGETHER TO BECOME A HOLY TEMPLE IN THE LORD.** We celebrate how 150 years ago God gathered a group of German immigrant Christians around his Word and Sacraments to form the German Ev. Lutheran Church in Watertown, Jefferson Co. Wisconsin. – Now St. Marks Ev. Lutheran Church. Why did those early settlers come together? What has held the members of St Marks together so that after 150 years, that little congregation has grown into a dynamic group of 3,500 people? What still keeps you, St. Mark's congregation, a strong, vital church today? So today let's look at the founding –and the FOUNDATION – of St. Marks. St. Marks is a congregation founded solidly on God's Word. St. Marks is a congregation founded solely for Christ's mission.

I bought a house this summer, and my realtor told me a simple truth: "A house is only as good as its foundation." If a building is to rise tall, last a long time, and function to accomplish its purpose – it has to have a strong foundation! Perhaps some of you have gone to New York to see the huge holes, which held the foundation of the World Trade Center towers. Maybe you have gone to Chicago to see the Sears Tower, the tallest building in the US and second tallest in the world. Did you know that the foundation of the Sears Tower contains 2 million cubic feet of concrete – enough to build an 8-lane highway five miles long? Contrast that to the earthquake recently in Iran where thousands of people died. What kind of foundations do you think those buildings had?

St. Mark's church is a beautiful spiritual building made up of "living stones" as Peter calls believers. Our builder is God himself. God chose each and every one of you – as he has ST. Mark's members over the past 150 years – chose you out of pure grace - to be joined together into this glorious spiritual building. Now this sanctuary was made of quality "Watertown brick". Right from the start it was good material to work with. But God took us as sinners, totally unfit like chunks of worthless mud because of our sins – and made us part of his holy church. Just think of a sin you've committed today, or yesterday, or last week. How could he use us who so easily fall, who so often ignore him and rebel against him? In pure grace, He called us to faith by his Holy Spirit – the baptismal font, made personally by a stonecutter who was a St Marks member – reminds us of that. He daily purifies us through the shed blood of Jesus. The crucifix of Jesus above the altar focuses our attention on that holy sacrifice which cleanses us from every sin. Our church history records the statue was said to have been carved by a 14-year-old boy from the Watertown area. Over 150, God has taken worthless mud sinners like us and made them into holy, precious stones.

And those stones he has built – and *is* building –on the best foundation. What is that? You know – **YOU ARE BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, WITH CHRIST JESUS HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.**

The firm foundation of St. Marks always has been and still is "**THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS**" – the Word of God, with Christ himself being the most important part of that: **CHIEF CORNERSTONE.** Nothing

more, nothing less. Not the opinions of the pastors here, not what is popular or unpopular in society, not what will “help our congregation gain members” - but the pure Word of God. – is our foundation.

How important that is when so many Christian churches are building on other things. Once at my former church in Morton Grove Ill., the neighboring priest came by to try to pursue me to participate in the community Thanksgiving service that year. When I asked if I would be able to preach about the thing I am most thankful for – the forgiveness of sin and eternal life through the work of Jesus, - he said, “No, we don’t mention the name of Jesus because we don’t want to offend anyone there”.

Today look at the foundation that St. Marks has been built upon over the past 150 years and thank God for it! It’s the precious, pure Word of God. Jesus said, **HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NEVER PASS AWAY.** Isn’t that you need to build your life upon; to set your priorities by? Isn’t that what you need to build your relationship with God upon and your eternal future? My friends thank God today for the foundation this congregation has been built upon for 150 years. Thank God especially that as part of this congregation, you are building on it today!

But now let’s look at St Mark’s foundation in another way. Why did God reveal His holy word and lay that solid foundation? Why is God building you, his holy Church, on that foundation? Did Jesus ever say, “Feed all the hungry!” or “Stop all the wars!”? No! Jesus himself said there would be famine and wars and rumors of war right up to the end time. Christ did not found his church on earth to make life better for everyone, though that may happen, as we love our neighbor with Christ’s love. He didn’t even found and build St. Marks so that we could comfortably sit here today with thankful hearts and bring him our praise! No, God laid this solid foundation and founded this congregation for a single over-riding purpose. What’s that? To get on with Christ’s mission of sharing the Gospel and saving souls. Even after 150 years, and *more so* after 150 years when God has prospered us as he has, St. Marks building project must go on: **THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS....GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE!**

Our forefathers knew that ‘s what we were here for. Already in 1860 St. Mark’s permitted Pastor Bading to serve other area missions on the Sunday afternoon on the 4th Sunday of every month. On the 8th Sunday of every month he could take the whole day!

But there were more immigrants to serve, and there was a crying need for more pastors. At the synod convention of 1861 both Pastor Bading and St. Marks delegate spoke out for establishing a college and a seminary. In 1863 the synod asked Pastor Bading, then the synod president, to go back to Germany and Russia and collect funds for the new school. St. Marks agreed – and off he went and his family for one full year. The first WELS seminary was established at 814 N. 4th St. – a building that was on my paper route as I was growing up. One the outside there is a plaque: “Northwestern College opened in this house in Sept., 1863, with one professor and 3 students”.

But St. Mark’s was interested in more than German souls. It was founded upon God’s Word, which calls us to **MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS.** Did you know that the first two WELS missionaries to a “foreign mission” were commissioned right here in front of this altar? Our 6th pastor, Pastor Brockman, was trained at a mission school in Germany. Our history records he worked “untiringly for the founding of our first mission to non-Christians, the Apache Indians in Arizona. The first two missionaries were commission in a service right here on Oct. 4, 1893, and they set out early the next morning for Arizona. And that work is still going on today!

Do you still see that as the reason for St. Mark’s existence? Isn’t the main reason for the existence of God’s church on earth to spread the Gospel so that people can get to heaven? St. Luke writes, **SALVATION IS FOUND IN NO ONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME, UNDER HEAVEN, GIVEN AMONG MEN, WHEREBY WE MUST BE SAVED.** We must never forget that. Without Christ, everyone must stand before God in his sins.

