I remember when I first was here. I came for an interview in June of 1986 and Bill Roden showed me around before I met with the call committee in the evening. As he showed me the sanctuary I was struck by the beauty and the warmth of this place. Surrounded by the depictions of the first witnesses to Christ, I sensed then that it would be a joy to worship here, as I have since found to be true.

Many times since then, people have spoken to me of the beauty and the worshipful atmosphere of this place. I tell them that others did the planning and constructing, Pastor Stein and the committees that chose most appropriately what would be here. I can take no credit for what anyone sees here, I only can give thanks to God for the people who have built and maintained this place for worship.

All through history where God's people have worshipped has been important to them. Who knows how many of you have become a part of this congregation because initially you were attracted by the beauty of this place. The temple, cathedrals, church buildings have been built with the finest materials, and people have gloried in their beauty, for we have been building God's house, his dwelling place. But while we are busy building and maintaining our places for God to dwell, God is busy making his own dwelling through Jesus Christ.

So then, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

God is building his house, a dwelling of greatest beauty. All who see his dwelling will marvel at its glory and majesty for he who made all
things that are has chosen this dwelling as his last and crowning creation. 
A holy temple with Jesus Christ the cornerstone, and Peter and Paul and
James and John and Mary each one a stone making up the foundation. And you 
who believe in Christ, baptized into Christ, nourished at his table, you 
are the finest stones built into this temple. You are God's people, you 
are his dwelling place, through Christ and in Christ he has made you more 
beautiful and precious than all the gold and silver, all the fine wood and 
stained glass of our buildings.

We live in a time and a place where outward beauty and attractiveness 
seem so important. Bright colored clothes, attractive appearance, being 
handsome or pretty, how we live for and treasure these. But the beauty God 
has created in Jesus Christ is of a different sort altogether.

First and most glorious in God's temple is faith. That in every day 
and moment you would rest your life in Christ, following where he leads, 
trusting in his strength. The Lord is my Shepherd is a great expression of 
this faith, where the twenty third psalm is not just recited but lived, 
there is a lovliness and beauty greater than any outward appearance.

With faith is hope. Even in the valley of the shadow of death there 
is hope in Jesus Christ, for we know as he was raised from the dead so will 
we be raised.

And the silver and gold of God's temple is love. Not simply words but 
deeds of faithfulness to those who do not deserve. As Christ has loved us, 
so we love one another. Not simply when it is easy or convenient, but we 
love one another even when that love is costly, for our Lord gave his life 
for us.

You are God's temple, the place in all creation where he has chosen to 
dwell. So Paul could write, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer 
nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For 
this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of
glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

As Christians we are called to live by what is unseen. When you look in the mirror, Christ invites you not to be fooled by what is passing away, but to know that in this person that looks back at you, the almighty and eternal God has chosen to dwell. Christ invites you not to see every wrinkle and blemish, but to see a person so precious that Christ willingly suffered and died just to be with you forever. Christ invites you to see the person forever made fresh and new in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Then as you turn from the mirror to see others, look not at their clothes, nor their appearance, but see that they too are precious to Christ. Your neighbors the ones in whom God has chosen to dwell in his spirit. Look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen, for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So if this is a beautiful place, how much more so are you a beautiful people in Christ. If we can take pride for having made a most place here, how much greater is God's pride when his holy temple adorned with faith and hope and love. If we are right to preserve and maintain this place which will one day have turned to dust, how much more so is God right as he takes what was once dust and maintains and preserves us forever.

Thanks be to God.