

# **Fire destroys historic church building in Ranger**

March 21, 2022

Members of Second Baptist Church in Ranger and a significant number of their neighbors gathered for worship on a parking lot across the street from the fire-gutted remains of their historic church building on March 20.

Authorities believe the fire that consumed the century-old church facility in downtown Ranger was unrelated to the Eastland Complex wildfire, which has burned more than 54,000 acres and left families in several communities homeless.

During the outdoor Sunday worship service in Ranger, Pastor Wade Berry asked God to comfort the family and friends of Barbara Fenley, an Eastland County deputy sheriff who was killed while seeking to rescue people from the fire.

He also asked God's blessings on the families who had lost homes and livestock to the fire, and he offered thanks for the volunteer firefighters who battled the blaze.

## **'Storms will come'**



Pastor Wade Berry leads an outdoor worship service on March 20 in a parking lot across the street from the fire-gutted remains of his church's historic building. (Screen grab from Facebook Live)

Berry preached on the story of Jesus calming a storm as recorded in Luke 8, focusing on two questions raised in the passage. Jesus asked his disciples, "Where is your faith?" The disciples asked concerning Jesus, "Who is this?"

"Storms will come, and it does no good to deny them or minimize the trauma they bring," Berry said.

However, he told his congregation, storms also offer the opportunity for followers of Jesus to recognize Christ is who he says he is and to have their faith strengthened for life's challenges.

The sermon was part of a Lenten series Berry has been preaching. He

noted he finished writing the message just before he learned about the fire that consumed his church's building, but it proved to be perfect for the occasion.

"Never let anybody tell you the Holy Spirit can't work through preparation," he said.

Berry offered thanks that no members of his congregation lost homes, businesses or livestock to fire—either the downtown Ranger blaze or the Eastland Complex wildfire.

"One lady was watching out her window as fire approached, and she was making plans to move her cattle, but she didn't have to do it," he said.

## **Appreciation for support**

Berry—who arrived at Second Baptist in Ranger nine months ago—expressed appreciation for the support and encouragement he and his congregation received from Texas Baptists, Tri-County Baptist Association and neighboring churches.

He particularly noted leaders of the Ranger Ministerial Association helped make possible the March 20 outdoor worship service by helping to clear the parking lot and provide a portable sound system.

Next Sunday, Second Baptist Church will meet for worship in an auditorium at Ranger College.

Once the local fire chief releases the church building, it will need to be assessed, Berry said. After that, he expects the remains of the old burned-out building will have to be demolished.

"That will be a hard day" for members who were baptized and married in the facility and who attended the funerals of loved ones there, he

acknowledged.

The church plans to rebuild, but the congregation faces multiple decisions about when, where and how, he said, adding he would appreciate other Christians joining in prayer for Second Baptist.

“Pray that we will have wisdom and guidance about the future,” Berry said. “And pray that this experience will open doors of opportunity for our church to minister to our community.”