

1 Corinthians 3:5-17

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹ For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴ If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Sermon

God's Amazing Temple

1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Today it is a joy for many of us to once again be worshipping in this sanctuary. Even though Covid guidelines keep us from doing what we've 'always done', many of you have said that being in this place feels like you can meet with God. I understand that feeling fully. But here is the strange thing – for me it is a new experience! I have never worshipped in this space before – and I have been your pastor for 14 months! And yet, I have worshipped in the midst of God's sanctuary in Northfield, I have worshipped among you!

One of the most profound words in Scripture is the declaration we heard today “do you not know you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” So often we think of the sanctuary, the church, God's 'temple' as a particular building. It is not. God's temple is not a building, it is a people. We may have heard that statement all our lives, but Covid has revealed its truth. As Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders in Acts 7 “the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands”. Rather God dwells among and within God's people. Temples, sanctuaries, buildings are a necessary convenience for holding large gatherings, and they are an expression of our faith, as one saying puts it ‘an outward sign of an inward grace.’

I value sanctuaries for what they are – a place of gathering, and a creation of faith. I have served in many, many sanctuaries in my ministry as a pastor (over two dozen in my lifetime), and they all seem to point to what is at the heart of the congregation. Is the church 'Romanesque', with stone and stained glass? Usually there is a 'high and holy' order of worship and formality in that congregation's relationship to God. Is the building a plain and simple 'meeting house'? Then you might expect the form of worship to be more relaxed and informal, and maybe even casual towards its relationship to God.

But whether the church, the people and the sanctuary are ‘high or low’ all must give heed to the calling of this passage. The call of God is for us to be the people of God, and specifically to be establishing in, through and for Jesus Christ. Paul warns us that ‘no other foundation can be laid that the one that has been laid; and that foundation is Jesus Christ.’ That is the heart and soul of ‘being church’. There is no other basis. Without a relationship and a commitment to Christ we may be a community center, a service group, even a local theater, but not the house of God.

That is a scary and threatening thought. But Paul is holding our feet to the fire here (as well as the Corinthians), because what we build here and how we build will be tested and tried by God. Paul’s word to us is ‘build wise and build well.’ Build as Jesus said ‘on the rock and not on the sand.’ (Matthew 7:24-27) Build with all that is precious, not those things that burn away, or fade away with time. But build with those precious things that last- like ‘faith, hope and love’. (1 Corinthians 13:13), like ‘worship God in Spirit and Truth’ (see John 4:23) Those are the ‘shining gems’ in the hand of God (Isaiah 62:3).

God will only use the best to build his temple. So let us give ourselves, our best, to God and for God. Let us build ourselves – founded, rooted, and united with Christ and in Christ. And Let us be attentive to God’s Spirit, who is living and moving and working among us.

Let us be built into God’s amazing temple. Amen.

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Holy God, we thank you that you have chosen us to be your people; that you choose to dwell among us as we are and as you hope to build us to be. It is an awesome privilege and a great challenge to be a place where your Spirit rests and through which you engage the world. And so we come asking for your wisdom, strength, and courage, that we may work with you to build a temple which honors you.

We pray for your church and for this congregation. Deepen our roots in Jesus Christ and in the good news of his salvation so that all we do may reflect his life and minister his grace here and among all whom our lives touch.

We pray for all who lead this world. Grant them humility and hope that they may faithfully establish your way of justice, peace and well-being for all the world. We pray also for all who need you today. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the mourning, and your aid to the needy. We especially thank you for... and we ask your continuing care for...

We praise you, Glorious God, for all your mercies to us, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

The Lord’s Prayer

Choral Response

Remember Me

Offering

God has formed us as his dwelling place, as his servant people, entrusted with the vast resources of earth and heaven. Our offering proclaims those things we truly hold dear. Let us dedicate our gifts in hope, building on the foundation Jesus Christ has laid.

O God, with these gifts we express our desire to live as your people, to worship and serve you through this church and in the many different places our lives lead. May our faith effectively proclaim your grace and make tangible your goodness throughout the world. May all we do continue to build a living temple that glorifies you. Use them as you will. Amen.

Doxology (choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

Communion

Special Music "Here, At Your Table, Lord"
Invitation
Great Thanksgiving
Consecration and Service
Prayer of Gratitude

*Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Benediction

Go now into the world

And may God's power be at work in you, doing far more than we dare to ask or imagine.
May this church forever bring glory to God. Ephesians 3:30-21 adj.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude "The Church's One Foundation"

music provided by Chris Harris