

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

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1 Corinthians 3:1-10-11, 16-23

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
 (1 Corinthians 3:16 N.R.S.V.)

God's Temple

I remember when I was in the church youth group, back in another century, Rev. Paxton read these verses to us. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19:20)

Rev. Paxton talked to us about taking good care of our bodies. We were not to smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol or drugs. We were to be careful in our relationships and avoid sexual intercourse outside of marriage. We were to keep our bodies healthy and holy, a fit place for the Holy Spirit to dwell.

That did not mean we were supposed to worship our bodies, some people do that do, you know. We were to keep our bodies healthy and clean from sin, a place that would make God feel at home.

I'm not sure but he might also have included this verse from Paul's letter to the Romans. "I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

We were a pretty wild bunch back then, and the pastor probably thought we were not paying a bit of attention to what he was saying. But in fact, that made such an impact on me that I can still remember it 50 years later. That doesn't mean I always put these words into practice, but they did help shape who I became.

That should also give some hope and encouragement to our teachers and all those who work with our children and youth. We never know when God is going to take something we say or do and make a lasting impression in the lives of our young ones. God does work in mysterious ways!

In our text for today, Paul expands on this idea. He says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

In this case Paul is using the word “you” in a plural sense. He is talking about the community of faith, the church. You are God’s temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you. It is a grave sin to destroy God’s temple.

Paul is not talking about the church building. He is talking about the people. I couldn’t help notice on one of the churches that I drove by had this written in big letters on the side of their building. “The Marrtown Church of Christ Meets Here.” I thought that was a nice reminder. Not simply “The Marrtown Church of Christ” but, “The Marrtown Church of Christ Meets Here.”

The church is the people. Paul says the people of the church are the temple of God. God’s Holy Spirit dwells in you. If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy.

Now in some countries, those countries where the Christian faith is persecuted, the biggest threat to the church is from the outside. Here in our country, where we have freedom of religion, the biggest threat to the church comes from the inside.

One father was watching as a little boy was building something with blocks. “What are you building?” asked the father. “I’m building a church,” replied the boy, “so we have to be very quiet.”

“Why do we have to be quiet?”

“Because the people are sleeping!”

We laugh because we know there is truth in what the little boy says. The number one threat to the Christian Church in our country is apathy. I know I am preaching to the choir on this one. You are here this morning. You are building and strengthening God’s temple. And I give thanks that so many of you are involved in the ministry and work of God’s temple. I give thanks that as you are able - wait I started that wrong. I give thanks that as **God** makes you able, you are continuing Christ’s work in the place. We will talk more about that at our congregational meeting today.

One of my favorite passages is from Hebrews 10:23-25 “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

I supposed I have an odd sense of humor, but I get a kick out of this wording. We are to “provoke” one another to love and good deeds. So can go home this afternoon and tell your neighbor that the preacher really provoked you this morning!

If the number one thing most likely to destroy God’s temple, is apathy, the second most likely is control. Paul has a control problem at First Church of Corinth. The congregation has divided

and is identifying with different leaders. Some were saying, "I belong to Apollos." Some said, "I belong to Paul." Others said, "I belong to Peter."

That never happens in modern churches, right? We would never break into factions, other churches maybe, but not us. Of course this church has experienced factions and probably will again. Every church does.

Paul reminds us that there can be only one leader in the church, that is Christ. One plants, and waters, but God gives the growth. So we all know this, right? Hold up your hand if this is a surprise to you.

So why do church fights happen? Before you ask, no, as far as I know we do not have one brewing now. Which makes it the best time to preach about conflict, so we can be better equipped for the next one.

Disagreements are part of being human. I'm not talking about disagreements. Why do churches sometimes break into factions and fall into church fights that threaten to destroy the church?

The real reason is fear. Church fights happen when people become scared that some action or lack of action will destroy the church. This fear drives some people to believe that it is up to them to save the church. Then trust breaks down and nasty things happen.

People begin to identify with certain key leaders. I am with Apollos, I am with Paul. I am with Peter. And here is the strange thing, each faction believes that they are right and that it is up to them to save the church.

I have seen this happen and it is not fun. Paul's point is not that we have to trust each other. Paul's point is that we have to trust Christ. We have to trust that Christ is strong enough, and loving enough, and smart enough to save the church.

I want to show you something I saw on u-tube the other day. (God's Strength Prank CC1)

Video shows a nun walking across the parking lot carrying a big box. We can see the legs of a person in the box who is carrying the load. The nun sets the box down and a big strong man offers to carry it for her. He tries to pick it up, but of course the person in the box adds his weigh to the box and the man can't pick it up. The nun then thanks the big strong man and easily walks off with the box. Again we can see the legs of the person in the box, but the man who is standing behind her, cannot. The man stands there amazed that the nun can carry such a load by herself.

So if the box is the church and the Holy Spirit is the person inside the box, then all we have to do is act like the nun. We just hold on and let the Holy Spirit provide the power to move the church box. But if we panic and decide that it is all up to us, and we try to yank the church in thee direction we think is right, what happens? The box suddenly gets too heavy for us to move.

It is not unusual when a church fight happens that someone will plead, "We all need to get along and trust each other." While that certainly helps, it is not the complete answer. In the end it is not so much about trusting each other as it is about trusting Christ as the head of the church. We trust that Christ as the head has the power and influence to get those blockhead parts of the body

back on the right tract.

It is not up to the arms to reach down and yank the legs onto a different path. The arms trust the head to redirect those stupid legs. No reason for the arms to panic and try to correct things themselves. That's the head's job.

Christ is the head of the church. We trust Christ to have the power and the influence to redirect those stupid legs. We do this all the while remembering that we, that is you and me, might well be the stupid legs.