

“CHURCH BUILDING: We are the Church”

1 Corinthians 1.1-10 and 3.5-17

Sunday, October 9, 2016

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Today our focus is on the church. The building and the people. We gather in a physical structure, the church building, and yet we know that the church is more than a building. The church is the people. And the people of the church need to be built up. So we're going to think about our physical church building and about building up the people of the church.

To help us think about church building over these four Sundays, we turn to the First letter of Paul to the church at Corinth. Church historians and Bible scholars tell us that Paul helped found the church in the bustling commercial port city of Corinth, one of the most important cities in ancient Greece.

Paul spent 18 months there in Corinth, helping to build up the church. When not there he wrote letters to teach and encourage and sometimes correct them. What we call First Corinthians is not his first letter to them, as within the letter he refers to his previous letter. In fact, what we call First and Second Corinthians are probably the second and fourth letters from Paul to the church.

Large sections of these letters deal with very particular issues in the life of the church, and so sometimes the text doesn't feel very "holy." Parts of Paul's letters feel like Committee on Ministry reports about controversial issues. But over the next four Sundays, we're going to focus on the guiding principles, the more timeless teachings from various parts of First Corinthians, to help us think about being the church today in the 21st century.

Our first reading today introduces the letter. Paul reminds the people that they are called to be saints, to be sanctified, to be transformed. He notes how they have been built up, writing that they are enriched and strengthened as a church.

Famously in chapter 12, Paul used the imagery of the body, saying the church is one body with many parts, and when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers, and when one part of the body rejoices the whole body rejoices. In our second reading for today in chapter 3, he used agricultural imagery followed immediately by construction imagery.

The immediate context of our second reading is an apparent controversy or rivalry within the church, as people were following different leaders and dividing into factions. Paul reminds them of their unity and foundation in Jesus Christ, and of their calling to be built up.

Listen for God's word.

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according

to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

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. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—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. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

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.

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture. Amen.

Dorothy was right. "There's no place like home." We value our homes. We want a safe and comfortable place to live.

A recent hailstorm here in Madison and the destructive power of Hurricane Matthew have reminded us that we want our homes to be safe and comfortable. "There is no place like home."

I don't know what it's like to be homeless. I've met many homeless people over the years and listened to many sad stories, but I can't really imagine what it's like.

I've been learning more this week about the challenging and complicated situation of homelessness, as I'm reading the book *EVICTED*, by Matthew Desmond. It is subtitled *Poverty and Profit in the American City*, and it's the UW "Go Big Read" book this year. A member of this church was an advisor to the author.

Evicted documents the struggles of several families in poverty, who are trying to find ways to keep a roof over their heads.

Among the frustrating and heartbreaking stories, I was especially intrigued with the story of Scott. He grew up on a farm in Iowa, with a broken family, and he went off to college where he got a nursing degree. He worked at a nursing home, administering medicine, keeping patients clean, and lifting them in and out of bed.

After several years of middle class life, including one year where he earned \$88,000, Scott got injured while lifting a patient. He was no longer to help move patients without pain medicine. Long story short: he got hooked on pain pills, started stealing from patients, and got fired. He ended up on heroin, struggling to keep from being evicted.

In his and other stories, I see a mix of systemic failure and personal failure. Yes, Scott made poor choices but he also had a hard time getting the help he needed with addiction or affordable housing.

Scott, like many of the people in the book, is relatively alone dealing with his situation. Too many of the people in this book have no community around him, building them up, and too many of them end up without a building to live in, without a home.

In the final section of the book, author Matthew Desmond writes:

The home is the center of life. It is a refuge from the grind of work, the pressure of school, and the menace of the streets.... The home is the wellspring of personhood. It is where our identity takes root and blossoms. When we try to understand ourselves, we often begin by considering the kind of home in which we were raised. (*Evicted*, page 293)

We are the church. This is our spiritual home, the place where our identity takes root and blossoms.

Here at Covenant Presbyterian Church, most of us have not dealt directly with eviction and homelessness or drug addiction. But all of us struggle. And we are fortunate to have a community where we gather to be built up.

We are the church. Covenant is a place where we can pray to be strong in the face of distractions, as we pray "Lead us not into temptation." A place where we can pray and work for the transformation of unjust systems and even of the world itself as we pray "thy Kingdom come."

Covenant Presbyterian Church is our spiritual home, our place where we learn God's ways so that we can live God's ways. A place where our identities are formed. A building, which exists for the building up of us and the community and even the world.

The single most important thing about our church is the people, no doubt. But also very important to us is our building, this place where we gather. We need to take care of this

building, and this is why we're having a Capital Campaign this fall, to get a new roof, new windows, new furnishings, and more.

The goal for the campaign is \$770,000, which is a lot of money. But if we keep this building in good shape, the building up of the church and the community will be huge, and we'll see what a good investment this is, in building up people and building up the community around us.

The Next 25 Years: **Mission Dollars**

Source	Amount per year
Operating Budget	\$60,000
Endowments, Bequests, etc	\$20,000
Special Offerings	\$14,000
Miscellaneous	\$6,000
Total	\$100,000

\$100,000 per year x 25 years
= \$2,500,000 for mission
 over the next 25 years

The new roof should last for 25 years. Lots of good things can happen in 25 years. Let's think about our mission dollars.

Over the course of 25 years, we will give over 2.5 million dollars to local and global mission partners, who are working through schools, hospitals, homeless shelters, and churches to share God's love.

In terms of membership, if we average 40 new members over the next 25 years, we'll have 1,000 new people as members. One thousand new people with a clearer sense of meaning and purpose and Christian disciples. One thousand new members will learn about God's love and live in new ways, and live with a clearer sense of purpose and hope, serving the Kingdom of God.

The Next 25 Years: **Membership**

Class	New members
October 2015 Inquirers Class	15
April 2016 Inquirers Class	21
Confirmation Class 2016	7
Total	43

40 new members per year x 25 years
= 1,000 new members
 over the next 25 years

The Next 25 Years: **Acts of Love**

Church	Acts of Love
725 members	-
One act of love per week	725
X 52 weeks	37,700

37,770 acts of love per year x 25 years
=942,500 Acts of Love
over the next 25 years

One million Acts of Love!

Another way we could think about this is with “acts of love.” Kind things we say and do for each other. Washing the dishes, being a patient driver. Helping a neighbor in need. Letting someone else have the last donut.

With 725 members, each doing one act of love a week over 25 years, we’ll have 942,500 acts, and because we have some over-achievers, I’m confident that we’ll have over a million acts of love in 25 years.

Together, in large part through this building, we are being built up as God’s people to make a difference in the world out there, with our dollars, our faithful discipleship, and our acts of love.

I see great blessings continuing to happen now, as we let God shape us and mold us, and I’m hopeful for the future. Amen.