



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (A) –1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Focus: *God's Temple*

word of life

“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.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NRSV)

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

The Apostle Paul is known for the variety of images and metaphors he uses to teach about Christ. For example, in the third chapter of this letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses three images to describe the church and what it means to live in the community of Christ.

The first image of the church used by Paul has an agricultural theme with believers being God’s field. Human leaders, such as Paul himself, plant seeds of faith and nurture growth. Yet it is God alone who brings growth in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second image is architectural with Christ being the true foundation in which the church is built. “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.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11 NRSV) When constructing a building, it is essential to have a firm foundation for the structure.

1. *Compare and contrast these agricultural and architectural images of the church.*
2. *What do you hope every church is built on?*

The lectionary skips over the next section of verses which elaborates on the building metaphor. If you find this imagery helpful, be sure to take time to read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

Paul’s third image for the church is a temple, but not just any temple—God’s temple. “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.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NRSV)

3. *How do you understand your church to be God’s temple?*
4. *What are the implications for anyone—inside or outside—the church who wants to destroy God’s temple?*

Paul’s images are not individualistic in nature. Believers are intended to live in Christian community and to be part of the church. Each of us is connected to others through our baptism. Together, we are God’s field, built on a foundation of Christ, and joined to be God’s temple—all by the grace of God.

“For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.” (1 Corinthians 3:21b-23 NRSV) Anything else is foolishness.

5. *What do you find most helpful in Paul’s words?*
6. *How do you feel about being described as God’s temple?*

Word among us

The old preacher used to say, “The church would be a great place if it weren’t filled with sinners!” After people laughed, he would add, “But then again, without all those sinners, it would be empty.”

Unfortunately, sin is evident in the church when bickering and quarrels among the Christians arise. Many times, the quarrels are not over significant theological truths or interpretation of scripture, but rather over inconsequential issues or personality differences.

1. *In your experience, what are topics which stir people in church to quarrel?*
2. *What do you want to say when you hear quarreling in the church?*

Paul responded to the quarrels in Corinth by reminding them of what it means to be the church. His images of the church are helpful for our contemporary times. Together, the church is God’s field, the place where God’s grace can grow and bear abundant fruit. And the church is also like a building, a structure not made of brick and mortar, but with Christ alone as the foundation. Anything else is sinking ground.

3. *How does your congregation resemble God’s field? What is growing?*
4. *Where do you see the foundation of Christ in your church? Are there some shaking areas which might need to be bolstered?*

The church is also God’s temple—holy and set aside for God’s purpose. Take a moment to consider the beauty of your temple of God—those people of your congregation called, gathered, and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Celebrate the diverse gifts they bring to make your congregation a unique temple of the body of Christ. Not all aspects of a glorious temple need to be the same. The challenge and opportunity is to maximize the diversity found in your congregation. It is God alone who gives meaning and purpose to the church.

5. *How does your congregation reflect being a temple of God?*
6. *When, if ever, does your congregation forget its purpose for being?*
7. *What are effective ways to remind a church about its purpose?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

What an opportunity we have as Christians to expand beyond our biological family to include brothers and sisters in Christ. But genuine fellowship doesn’t just happen when we walk through some doors of a building. It is not helpful to the whole to expect others to do it “our” way—such as asking others to sing “our” favorite kind of music.

Instead, the church is to live as God’s holy temple, reflecting qualities of God as seen in Christ Jesus. Each of us belongs to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

8. *How has your life been blessed by being part of a church?*

Prayer

God, form us to be your temple, reflecting your glory made known in Christ Jesus. Amen

last word

Find ways to encourage others who are part of your congregation—the holy temple of God.