

## Where God Lives: 1 Corinthians 3:9-23

Norwalk Christian Church, May 12, 2019, Mother's Day, Renovation Dedication Sunday, Year C, Eastertide 4, Non-Lectionary

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Let's be honest...the Apostle Paul would be caught off guard by this thing we call "church buildings." Of course, he was familiar with temples and houses of God--the Jewish people had long built tabernacles, temples, and synagogues in order to house their worship.

But church buildings didn't exist in the first century. The church met first in the synagogues, until they were kicked out. So they moved into people's homes and other gathering places. Wherever they could find space.

There were no church building in Corinth.

As Christianity grew--in numbers and in power--we started building. First simple structures, then elaborate cathedrals. These buildings had different purposes: some were utilitarian--functional places to house the activities of Christians. Others were seen as destinations, like the temple in Jerusalem, holy places where heaven and earth met, where your mere presence inside of them made you feel like you stepped into another world or dimension.

No matter the kind of structure, we Christians have had a consistent struggle. Over time, we begin to see the building as the "Church". We identify God's activity only with what happens within that building.

I said more than once last week, "We're worshipping back in our church this Sunday." And this is a church. But this building--as beautiful as it is, and new as it seems this Sunday, as fresh, and functional, as holy as this space may be to us--this is *a* church, but this is not *the* church.

There's a an old song Marti and I listened to when we were in High School. It said, "You can't go to church, because the church is you."

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To Christians in Corinth who had no physical meeting space, no temple in which they could worship, Paul's words were a source of comfort. You don't need a temple, for you are the temple of God. Now, that word "you"...that's not a singular "you." That's a "y'all". *Y'all are the temple of Christ*. The Christians in Corinth do not worship in a church--they are the church.

To Christians in Norwalk, who have a beautiful gathering space, one we spent time and money renovating; one that we have built upon a foundation of decades of others who have gone before us--to us, gathered here today to dedicate this renovated building, Paul's words are a helpful reminder that this place may a church building, and it may

facilitate a lot of ministry; people's lives are changed here, and it is truly a blessing--but this building is not the church. Y'all are the church. We are the church!

Do you not know that YOU are God's temple? Do you not know that God's Spirit dwells in all y'all?

We learned this over the last few months. Whether we worship, in this room or in a rented funeral home, we are still Norwalk Christian Church. And when we scatter to home, school, work, out and about in the community--wherever you are, church is.

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Yes, yes, I know. This is a strange sermon for a church celebrating a renovation that we've been planning in some form for almost 7 years! But as we celebrate something, indeed, worth celebrating, may we not lose sight of where God lives.

These walls and floors, this pulpit and table--they are, indeed, holy, and we dedicate them to God. This building is a tool for ministry, and because of the things celebrate today, more ministry will be possible here--and may it always be increasingly so.

But do not think for once that God lives here. This is not God's home. God lives within you.

You are holy. You are special. You are God's dwelling place! God lives in you and works through you! You are worth celebrating.

It doesn't matter the condition or age of the temple, it doesn't matter if you feel worthy of the calling--you are God's temple. You are where God lives, and you are worth investing in. Believe this good news.

We have already dedicated our renovated church building, but I think it's time we dedicate the church.

So, would the church please stand as you are able, and repeat after me:

*Though we may at times forget,  
we are the temple of God.  
The Holy Spirit dwells in us.  
Wherever we go, may we take God with us.  
May we be a welcoming space  
For all God's people.  
May our hands  
Our feet  
Our lips  
Our heart  
Be God's.*

*May our presence in this world,  
 Be God's presence in this world.  
 Renovate us, O God,  
 As we have renovated this space.  
 Use us, O God,  
 To bring your kingdom,  
 On earth as it is in heaven.  
 We are the church!  
 We are God's house!  
 Alleluia! Amen!*

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Never lose sight of who you are, church. You are where God lives, and this space we are in is holy, because God is present here through you.

So now, as the dedicated temple of God, you are invited to join together as God's people at the table of the Lord.

*This communion table might be our favorite part of this entire renovation. Yes, the elevator is pretty cool, and that back wall is impressive--but this table. This is where church will happen. This is where God's people gather!*

*This table was also hand-crafted by Ron Routh, made entirely of scraps of wood from his shop. It is pieced together, like the pulpit, from different kinds of wood of various shades and strengths, each piece unique and beautiful in it's own way, yet coming together they are something that no individual piece could be by themselves.*

*And what a better picture of who should strive to be and already are as God's people. Everyone of us is unique. Different shades, strengths, and gifts. We are different. We are diverse. But together, God has pieced us together as God's people.*

*Now, rub your hand along this table, and it's not completely smooth. You can still feel some cracks, the joints of the pieces of wood. We're a little rough, too. We're not perfect--yet in our imperfections, we are beautiful. Like this table, it is the diversity and imperfections of God's people that make us beautiful.*

*Some of these pieces of wood were reclaimed from buildings. Some were scraps from other projects. But each one, now, has a purpose--indeed, a holy purpose. Don't let anyone ever tell you you are a scrap. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you are used up or have no purpose.*

*Every Sunday, at this table, we take ordinary bread, ordinary grape juice that we call wine, and we bless it, break it, and share it. God isn't in the business of using perfect, special things--God uses the broken, the discarded, the used up, the scraps, and the everyday things of this world for a holy purpose. God uses you, me--and everyone--as holy vessels. So, this morning, as our last act of dedication...*