

Officer Ordination Installation Sunday

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Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

¹⁰According 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. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ....

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. ¹⁸Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." ²¹So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Proclamation of the Word

I was freaked out the day I went to the Pentecostal church. My friend Doug and I were feeling adventurous and curious. We became friends our freshman year at Presbyterian College. We were spiritually curious types. While other college students were interested in other kinds of spirits, we were looking for the God's Spirit. I grew up on the 5th pew of First Presbyterian Church. Doug grew up in a non-denominational church in Florida. So to venture into the waters of the Pentecostal church was a stretch for me. I had been to things like FCA rallies, Billy Graham crusades, and contemporary Christian rock concerts where they have an altar call, but to show up on a Sunday morning to a Pentecostal church felt like I was an alien visitor from another planet. Makes me wonder what some folks experience when they come worship here. Anyway, the worship was casual and engaging. The electric keyboard helped lead the praise songs. There was hand raising. Nobody spoke in tongues. I was doing just fine until I hit the front door where the preacher took me by the hand, looked deeply into my eyes, and said, "I see the Holy Spirit in you." I got out of there fast before they laid on hands and started praying over me. In my church we might get as animated as "extending the right hand of fellowship," but none of the Holy Spirit, holy-roller talk.

I see the Holy Spirit in you. After all that is what Paul tells the church in Corinth, and that is what we learn about the church at Fort Hill today.

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

The you here is plural. "Y'all are God's Temple and God's Spirit dwells in y'all." If you remember, Paul is having a come to Jesus meeting kind of conversation with the church folks at Corinth. They are fussing with each other over leadership whether they follow Paul's ways of doing things or Apollos' ways, both church planters and developers. Paul has reminded them that they are to follow Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church or as he writes here, the foundation on which they are built. You belong to Christ. Christ belongs to God. So you belong to God, not Paul or Apollos, in other words.

Paul knows his Scripture- God's Big story. This Temple talk did not come out of thin air. He knows that God created the Garden of Eden, man and woman in order to live together with them. God created a sort of temple there, but by Chapter 3 of Genesis we know that the relationship was broken and sin entered. God did not leave them, but they did not understand God's intentions for them. Then we read in Exodus that God freed his Hebrew people and dwelled among them- going before them as a fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. When they were in the wilderness, God gives real specific instructions about building a Tabernacle- a visible dwelling, a tent really, so that the people could meet together and know the presence of God. God "tabernacled" among them. It was not until King Solomon that they built an actual Temple. Until then, God's presence was shown in the ark of the covenant which contained the tablets of the Law which was kept in a tent. Imagine that. God camping out with his people.

Picture that. If we looked the Sinai wilderness up on Google Earth it would have looked a bit like a refugee camp- a rag tag band of Hebrews setting up camp which contained the Tabernacle of the Lord. No one would see that and think, "Holy smoke, that is where God Almighty dwells! Wow." Just like we might look at ourselves and others and think the same. Look around you. Now you might be thinking "I am not so sure the Spirit is living in Sister Susan or Brother Bill or that kid with a tattoo or that man who looks grumpy."

Sometimes I am running errands, running by the grocery store in my workout clothes, and I run into one of you. I have been introduced as your minister to someone else. On many occasions and I get, "You don't *look* like a Minister!" And I would probably freak them out if I said, "Well, actually I am a temple of the Holy Spirit- God lives in me!" Because that is the truth- you and I who are baptized into Christ, are just that- dwelling places of the Most High God.

The dwelling place of God is not a golden throne room, bathed in an amber light, and decked out with rich tapestries and curtains. More often than not the dwelling place of God is a tired looking tent in a desert wasteland, a carpenter's son from a small town, the gap-toothed <low-country farmer driving his John Deere tractor across a field of soybeans>, the flour-dusted face of the old woman lovingly making an apple pie for her grandkids, the harried CPA trying to get her columns of figures to add up, the awkward teenager making profession of faith and hoping no one in the congregation much notices the pimple under his chin. These are the latter-day ~~tabernacles~~ <temples> of God's Spirit! ⁱ

I can picture the Apostle Paul like Oprah when she has a big giveaway on her show. Instead of you get to go to Hawaii and you get to go and you and you. Paul wants to point to each one and say, "You are a Temple of the Holy Spirit...and you...and you...and Brad...and Harold...and Andy....and Diane...and Beth...and Kayleigh." You are a Temple of the Holy Spirit.

You are a part of God's big, big story. God lives in a people, the church, and each person individually. Marked by Christ with the sign of the cross in water, that cross will never wash off. You know it is unfortunate that somewhere along the way, we reformed Christians lost the habit of marking ourselves with the sign of the cross and the Triune God as our Catholic and Episcopalian friends do. What if you and I started waking up each morning and crossed ourselves in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as a reminder that God lives in and through us- that first and foremost, that is our identity. What if we left our house each morning and returned home at night and at the door cross ourselves physically to remember that as we go out and come in we belong to God- we are a physical presence of the church of Jesus Christ wherever we go? That might change how we speak to others, how we filter the news, where we walk and what we see and say. I challenge you to try it each day this week. Do this at your door each time you come and go. Remember your baptism and sign yourself with the cross of Christ.

At Fort Hill church, and in our tradition, we believe that every member is a minister. We ordain some to ordered ministries of the church as Elders, Deacons, and the pastors who are Ministers of Word and Sacrament, but each one of us is a minister, ordained by Christ in our Baptism.

There is a Shift that has been happening in our world over the last 20 years or so. Maybe you have heard the phrase "Missional Church" and wondered what that means. There is a great Youtube video that I have shared to our Church Facebook page to explain it called Missional Church: Simple.ⁱⁱ To sum up, *churches used to spend lots of resources to construct attractive facilities in the community in which they are situated. They offer great music, compelling teaching, and a host of programs designed to draw people to church. Anyone who wanted to come was welcome. Church members were encouraged to invite their friends and neighbors. Generally people had a pleasant experience. The people there felt well-cared for and seemed relatively similar in terms of education, income, interests, race, struggles and history. Then someone asked the question, "What about all the people who aren't like us, but live around us. Why aren't they here, too?"*

In response the church increased its marketing budget, direct mailing the community, taking out ads in the paper, released a fresh webpage, and decided to host the World's greatest event-ever. The church wanted to be the center. Church members started relying on the church to convey the story of God. If someone could be brought to an event they could hear about Jesus from a professional teacher. Inviting people became synonymous with evangelism.

The missional church on the other hand, empowers its members to be the church in the community. The church trains, resources, and challenges disciples to live out the good news in the community especially among those who would be suspicious of church and its marketing efforts. The church sends out its members to live among people unfamiliar with church customs, songs, and what it holds sacred just like a foreign missionary.

The missional church recognizes then that every disciple embodies the life of the church in their neighborhood, school, dorm, place of work each one of them telling God's story in the context of compassionate, genuine relationships. <Here ends the video>

Does any of that sound familiar? Missional church is a place where we equipped for ministry through worship and learning, through community and practices, and then we are sent back into the world to impact where we live, the people we encounter, or to seek out God's children with whom we would not have contact. We cross boundaries and differences that usually divide us by race, income, persuasion and see what God might teach us. We build bridges through relationships by the grace of Christ. The church is gathered and scattered. We gather regularly in order to scatter into our daily lives to make a difference. Sounds like hash browns at Waffle House- we are Gathered, Scattered, Covered by the Spirit and Smothered in God's grace and love. We usually say, "We come to church." More fittingly, "We are the church."

In two weeks, March 10-12, we will be talking about these SHIFTS going on in our church and lives. The Rev. Mark Tidsworth will be here on Sunday and Monday to help us be equipped as disciples who impact our community. Saturday he will work with our Session Mark has been working with our leaders since last year as we held SHIFT small groups and have been learning about how to be God's church in today's changing world. I hope you will attend and be renewed in your faith and witness.

Remember...You are Temple of the Holy Spirit. You are the church of Jesus Christ. We would hope others would say, "I see the Holy Spirit in you."

Remember all that led up to the gospel and to that big day of Pentecost that changed you and me from ordinary lumps of clay into tabernacles, into Temples, of the living God. It is a story that spans cosmic history, that involves the blood, sweat, and tears of God's only begotten Son. It is God's story, our story, and God is doing a new thing. How will you and God write the next chapter of the story? How will we write it together as Fort Hill church? That is the question we are asking.

ⁱ Scott Hoezee, Sermon Starters on Lectionary 5A at cep.calvinseminary.edu

ⁱⁱ"The Missional Church: Simple" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK_sd68 or the Simpson's version at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y5aRftGTig>
