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Matthew 5:38-48 & 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23
“Y’all are the Temple of God”
Rocky River Presbyterian Church

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

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.

Matthew 5:38-48

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your GOD in heaven; for GOD makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

“Y’all are the Temple of God”

During the height of the pandemic my kids and I launched into an epic Netflix rewatch of the television show Glee. If you don’t know the show, Glee followed the exploits of a bunch of misfit high school youth who were trying to figure out who they were and how they were supposed to find their way in the world. To our delight, they did this through fully staged musical numbers. In one episode called “The Substitute,” Mr. Shuester, the beloved Glee Club director, comes down with the flu and has to miss a week of rehearsals. The kids arrange for a substitute, Ms. Holly Holiday, to come and take over their rehearsals. She is received by the

group like a breath of fresh air. She is all about FUN and ENERGY; she lets the students do whatever they want. As you can imagine the students LOVE this and quickly get carried away. But when it counts Ms. Holiday isn't there for the kids...she doesn't provide the guidance and support they really need when everything falls apart.

My guess is the church in Corinth would be able to relate to the competing models of leadership presented by the Glee leaders. You see the ancient city of Corinth, where Paul planted his beloved church, was a thriving metropolis. It was situated on an important trade route, so wealth flowed in and through the community.

Earlier in this book Paul acknowledges that this was such an important city that he was not the only apostle to make visits and plant churches there. Paul has been concerned about cliques beginning to form around the different leaders, including himself and Apollos (1:10).

The Christians there were beginning to bicker among themselves about which leader was the best, about what role the wealthy should have in the church, how the members of the church should relate to one another. *We don't know anything about these kinds of arguments today, do we?*

Unfortunately, whenever we engage Paul's letter to the church in Corinth it is too easy for us to see ourselves in the divisions that existed in those days; Life keeps proving that not much has changed...

We live in a world dominated by divisive politics, by differing opinions about the role of the church and how church members should relate to one another and to the world around them. With this in mind, it makes sense that Paul's call to unity in Christ seems all too important to us. But we must pay attention to Paul's words here. Paul doesn't call the members of his church to strive for unity based on Paul's beliefs and personality. Instead, in verse 10, Paul refers to himself as a "skilled master builder." The Greek word that the NRSV translates "skilled" is *sophos*, which means "wise."

As a "wise" master builder, Paul builds with what he has been given: Christ himself, more specifically Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. These are the true foundations of the church, the true foundations of our lives, upon which everything should be built. This is where we find our unity.

There is a non-denominational church in Cleveland Heights, right beside the campus of Case Western Reserve. It happens to be very close to the coffee shop where I like to go to write. From my favorite seat I can look out the window and see their marquee all lit up like a movie theater - their church slogan, flashing outside for all to see - "Make Jesus Famous."

This slogan drives me insane! It actually offends me. The charismatic leaders of this congregation see this slogan as a call to evangelism, a call to share the Good News of Jesus with people. But the folks I have gotten to know in that coffee shop, who are mostly graduate students, tell me they have visited the church and they feel the slogan is an attempt to play on the worst impulses of our culture - a culture that is obsessed with celebrity and notoriety.

The pastors, they tell me, are very engaging, very fashionable, with short pithy messages; the services are slick, like a well-produced television show...serving up a version of the Gospel that they felt was a mile wide and an inch deep.

I do not mean to stand here and tear down another congregation's attempts to share the Gospel...I do not mean to say they are doing everything wrong, and we as members of the PCUSA, a "good mainline congregation" with our organ and liturgy have the corner on the way things should be done.

But I will admit that I have sat in that coffee shop and stewed about that "Make Jesus Famous" slogan for years. I actually avoided inviting those pastors to meetings of the religious community in the Heights because I felt their version of faith was shallow and superficial. But as I reread this part of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth – I felt the Spirit holding a mirror up to my face reminding me that God's temple is actually pretty BIG and plenty diverse. In verse 16, Paul says, "¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" We must be careful...in our individualistic culture it is easy to think that Paul was talking to one person, but Paul's letter was to the CHURCH in Corinth, not to one person in the church. The greek here is the plural you...Paul was using the most perfect contraction EVER – Y'ALL

Paul was really saying, "Do **y'all** not know that **y'all** are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in ALL **y'all**?"

God dwells in each of us and together we bear the image of Christ to the world. Paul reminds us though to be wary of HOW we bear that image to the world...that our witness should be built upon the foundation of Christ and not upon the foolish wisdom of this world.

Followers of Christ should not look for the most popular leader; we should not look for the best music; we should not look for the leader who makes everything fun and exciting; we should look for the leaders who point us toward the life of Christ, toward the death and resurrection of the one who is our living water, the one who offers the bread of life and the cup of salvation, toward the one who calls us to follow.

But what does this look like? The creators of the lectionary gave us the perfect example in the Gospel of Matthew to help us frame our witness for the world. The world is pretty clear about how it expects people to act. If someone hurts us, we are expected to strike back, to inflict harm; in fact I would say that the world expects us to strike FIRST if we perceive that an attack is coming. The world expects us to keep what is ours, to hold on for dear life to the things that we have worked hard to accumulate. The world expects us to cling tightly to our neighbors, but unfortunately, the world keeps rewriting the definition of neighbor, so that the pool of candidates gets smaller and smaller, while the definition of enemy gets larger and larger. This is the foolishness of the world. To see enemies wherever we go; to gather in our little communities to be safe; to cling to what is ours at all costs.

But Christ and Paul invite us to look at the world differently. They invite us to see the "Y'all"

Having been in ministry for over 20 years now, I have come to understand that we all experience God in different ways. That *"Make Jesus Famous"* slogan might drive me absolutely insane, but those who find it meaningful are no less God's children than I am – they are no less bearers of God's Spirit than I am. When we go out into the world we are the temple of God, and when we encounter those we love, when we encounter those we don't know, when we encounter those we consider our enemies, we are expected to see the "y'all"; to see that they are also the temple of God and bearers of God's Spirit.

As such we are invited to a different way of being in the world.

Frederick Buechner has written that "In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion **but an act of will**. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling...

in his terms, we can love them without necessarily liking them." When we see ourselves and those we encounter as part of Paul's "y'all," as a piece of God's holy temple we begin to see God in one another.

In this highly contentious world, our call to unity won't always be rooted in believing the same things but rather in the Y'all of God's love. Our call to unity is based in the fact that Christ died not just for my sins, or your sins, even for "Our" sins, but for the sins of our enemies, for the sins of the despised of the world, for the sins of the beloved in the world. Our unity comes from the heart of God and flows out into the world from a babe found in a manger, and from the empty tomb.

So let us make it an act of will if need be. Let us love one another.

Amen.