

## ***“Life Together in God’s Building”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
World Communion Sunday, October 4, 2015  
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Holy Scriptures: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 11: 17-26

### **Romans 12**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Marks of the True Christian

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **1 Corinthians 11: 17-26**

<sup>17</sup> Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. <sup>21</sup> For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for<sup>a</sup> you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

***<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple  
and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
<sup>17b</sup> For God's temple is holy, and you are that  
temple.***

### **Life Together in God's Building**

In the Apostle Paul's letters to young churches,  
he loved to develop a metaphor  
that might help to illuminate the magic and  
mystery

of life together in Christ.

As you know, a metaphor casts fresh light on ideas that  
might seem abstract.

Metaphor literally means: *to shed light; to illuminate.* [\[1\]](#)

Paul used construction metaphors

to illuminate the mystery of life in Christ,  
in sharing life together as the whole people of  
God.

Paul compares God's work and play to a skilled master  
builder, an architect.

Once the foundation is laid,  
no one else can change the foundation of the  
building.[\[2\]](#)

Paul teaches us that "that foundation is Jesus Christ."  
The life and teachings of Christ are the bedrock of the  
church.

While we stand on the rock of God's love,

Oscar Romero testimony inspires us still: "*The  
church is all of us.*"

My friends, let's build God's temple

on a solid foundation of Christ's love and mercy,  
underpinning the Church with justice and  
grace.

Hopefully, prayerfully, faithfully

Christ's Church will stand the challenges  
of time and trials, tragedies and temptations,  
of disappointments and distractions,  
depressions and divisions,

lifting us up with the Joy of Jesus  
so that throughout our life  
together -- and beyond! --

the Church will give  
glory to God.

On this World Communion Sunday,

we affirm what yokes us in life together in Christ.

Too often we choose to dwell on divisions and disunity.

You know, they say that a Methodist pastor was asked to do a

funeral in the community.

Before agreeing to do so

he called his bishop and mentioned that the deceased citizen was a Baptist.

He requested permission to preside.

The Bishop responded, *“Bury all the Baptists you can.”*

## **Life Together in God’s Building**

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, asking,

*“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”*

allow me to say that it would have been simpler

if the Apostle Paul was a Southerner.

You see, Paul was using the verb and second person pronoun in the question.

In other words, the “you” he used three times in one sentence is plural;

which brings us to his cultural heritage.

Had Paul been a true southerner,

he would have liked his tea sweet and his sausage hot, preferred his NASCAR fast, his grits slow, his music country,

and his football on Friday night and Saturday afternoon.

If Paul were a true Southerner he would have asked the church:

*“Do y’all not know that y’all are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in y’all?”*

And we would have understood; we’d get it.

We would grasp that he was a church member

addressing his entire beloved community of faith.

We would understand on this World Communion Sunday  
that the Gospel is directed to us in the plural, one and  
all, in the same breath.

We would take to heart that the Spirit of God dwells, lives,  
breathes, has its meaning  
and takes residence and gives significance and  
sustenance

in this here church, in all of us, in this life  
together.

And what a blessing it is to be here on this holy day.  
Let us never, ever take for granted this opportunity to  
worship and give God praise.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared in his remarkable book, Life  
Together,

what a blessing, what a divine gift it is to be in Christ's  
Church.

Bonhoeffer said:

*“Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with  
other Christians.*

*It is by the grace of God*

*that a congregation is permitted*

*to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and  
sacrament.*

*The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely,*

*the proclaimers of the Gospel in [unchurched] lands stand  
alone.*

*They know that visible fellowship is a blessing.*

*They remember, as the Psalmist did,*

*how they went “with the multitude...*

*to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise,*

*with a multitude that kept holyday.” (Psalm 42: 4) [\[3\]](#)*

### **Life Together in God's Building**

Yesterday in our church park and playground during our

## Blessing of the Pets

I observed small children stomping in puddles  
and having a grand old time playing in the  
mud.

The joy of their playtime reminded me of the mother whose  
preschool boy  
played in the muddy backyard with the preschool girl  
next door.

When they were done splashing,  
they were so filthy that Mom plopped them both into  
a bathtub.

They looked at each other for a minute and then the little girl  
exclaimed,

*“Oh, so that is the difference between Protestants and  
Catholics!”*

In this blessed and beautiful life together,

God calls us to practice unity in the context of our  
uniqueness,

to practice inclusion despite the temptation to  
be exclusive,

to be a movement for wholeness in a  
broken world.

God’s temple is called to be a source of unity,

an oasis of cosmic grace in our human-made desert of  
division.

Christ’s Church is called to be holy,

a home for all God’s children, a safe haven for us to  
rub shoulders.

Bonhoeffer said,

*“The physical presence of other Christians  
is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the  
believer.”* [4]

God’s temple is purified by the fires and frictions of life and  
love.

While in seminary there was something about my social ethics teacher

Professor Roger Shinn that I really liked,  
yet could never put my finger on it.

What was it about his presence that moved me,  
made me appreciate him so, look forward to being  
with him?

What in his demeanor allowed me to sense his holiness?

One day a classmate named Alexandra Coe  
was talking about Professor Shinn and she said, "*His  
corners are honed.*"

Yes. Professor Shinn's corners were honed; he had no sharp  
edges,

his life had been shaped and smoothed over the years  
by challenges and grace,

making him both judicious and compassionate.

His holiness shown through.

Life together in the context of Christian ministry hones our  
rough edges

Christian unity brings us closer together;  
weekly Christian communion connects us  
to God and one another in the breaking  
bread together.

May Christ's Church's corners become honed,  
rubbed smooth by the challenges and graces  
we have encountered and overcome, with the  
help of God.

### **Life Together in God's Building**

Consider with joy and sincerity the implications of being  
God's temple.

**First, if you can do it by yourself, it won't be very  
big.**

If the temple you are building is only built by you,  
then accept right now that its reach will be short and  
impact short-lived.

If you think you don't need anyone else,  
then you are missing the point of God's building.

*"The church is all of us."*

We need each other, including the total, amazing diversity of  
God's creation.

We need each other, including the immigrant and the alien,  
the lost, the last and the least, the unloved and those  
who feel unlovable.

Unity and teamwork are essential components of building  
anything of value.

The unifying factor in temple building is the love we have  
from Jesus.

**Further, if what you are about does not continue  
after you are gone,**

**it was not very important in the first place.**

After you are gone, after we are no longer on this blue planet  
spinning in the sky,

will what you are doing, being, and sharing  
survive? Will it thrive?

What will be your living legacy?

When you are not still here to defend it,

will your work and play continue to stand and  
deliver?

The determining factor is the love you give, that was first  
given to you by Jesus.

Build your foundation on Christ.

Trust in the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you to work and  
play in this life together

to build a holy temple, one that adds depth and  
breadth for generations to come.



**Finally, if what you are building  
is not built on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ,  
then it may not be holy.**

Paul was writing to his beloved church in Corinth,  
a congregation embroiled in turmoil.

Jewish Christians believed one way, and Gentile Christians  
thought another way.

People were arguing, *“I belong to Paul,”* or *“I belong to  
Apollos,”*

or *“I belong to Cephas,”* or *“I belong to Christ.”* (1 Cor. 1: 12)

Let's face the facts:

folks today aren't much different than we were 20 or  
200 or 2,000 years ago.

Having access to more information at our fingertips  
does not mean that we are any wiser.

So many churches get caught up in tensions and divisions  
and self-righteousness.

Churches are like cats.

With all that hissing and scratching and yowling,

folks think they are fighting when in fact they are  
multiplying.

Well, all this spitting and splitting and dividing and going  
our separate ways

over pettiness and wedge-issues

has damaged the Church of Jesus Christ in the  
eyes of the world.

There is nothing more oft-putting to our neighbors than  
fussy people of faith.

Fussiness, and fanaticism.

Are you like me, finding it most difficult to discern anything  
holy

about religious fundamentalism,

whether its Islamic, Jewish, Christian, or any

religion or sect?

Jim Wallis observes that today's prevailing attitude is: *"I'm right and you're evil."*

I don't recall Jesus telling me or you or anyone  
to pull up the drawbridge after we were across. Do  
you?

The determining factor for the way forward is the love of  
Jesus Christ.

Let us in our life together as God's followers  
dare to boldly stand up and express that we refuse to  
allow

hard-hearted, narrow-minded, judgmental so-  
called religious leaders

to speak for us!

Honestly, does anyone here know the God fanatics speak  
with, or speak of, or speak for?

The God y'all know loves kindness and mercy, is slow to  
anger and quick to forgive.

The God y'all love is the one who picked you up when you  
were down

and then showed us how to do the same for one  
another.

### **Life Together in God's Building**

After Hurricane Katrina blew through and tore apart the Gulf  
Coast ten years ago,

our congregation took three mission trips to help  
rebuild homes and lives,

staying in Christian Churches and sharing  
God's love and labor.

Over the course of three years we travelled

to Moss Point, Mississippi; Gulf Port, Alabama; and  
Slidell, Louisiana.

On the August day in 2005 that Hurricane Katrina bore  
down on Moss Point, MS,

Ann Pickett took shelter.

After the storm, Ann Pickett emerged and looked around at the devastation.

*“She thought about her wedding, only three days away.  
...She went to church, but not just to bow her head and pray.  
She took [to church] her wedding food from her own freezer  
and,*

*in the church kitchen, she started to cook for her neighbors.  
Ann and her fiancé cooked up their wedding feast for any  
who came.*

*They prepared that meal on their own initiative,  
offering it up to the Spirit of God.*

*The location for the meal of grace was in a temple that bore  
the name:*

*Jesus Christ, Moss Point Christian Church.*

*Truth be told, disasters often bring out the best in human  
beings.*

*After flood and tornado and hurricane,  
...people [are] putting aside differences*

*and reaching out to help their [– our –] neighbors.” [5]*

In God’s time Ann Pickett got married; she is now Ann Pickett-Parker.

She served faithfully as the vice president of our

International Disciples Women’s Ministries.

*“One day she launched into action because she calls herself  
a Christian.*

*She set a table out in Christian love for her neighbors,  
any and all,*

*following the example of Jesus.” [6]*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*

[1] William H. Willimon, “Pulpit Resource” Vol. 39, No. 1, Pages 33-34.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Life Together, P. 18

[4] Life Together, P. 18

[5] "Whole: A Call to Unity in Our Fragmented World" by Sharon Watkins, 2014. Page 29.

[6] Ibid. P. 30.