
Do You See These Great Buildings?

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As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." (Mark 13.1-2)

[As part of our 8:45 service this morning, we welcomed children who have just completed their Holy Eucharist Instruction Class. They have been learning about the bread and the wine of Holy Eucharist. We welcome them! And, for them especially, I told the opening story of this sermon.]

When I was a little boy, there was not much more fun than seeing a big box of blocks and an empty living room floor. I thrilled to see that empty space, just waiting for my next grand castle to be constructed. And so I would begin to build, using the largest and longest blocks first, setting up foundations and imagining the towering structure.

After what seemed like an hour or so, but maybe it was only a half hour, I would have another architectural masterpiece for everyone in the house to adore. "Do you see these great buildings?" At least, my parents said they liked it. Sometimes even my sisters said they liked it. It would be great, until the cat came into the room. Or until my little brother came crawling through.

Then, suddenly, without my even knowing it, one wing of the castle was down, or maybe the whole thing would tumble down. I would be devastated! My day was ruined! Sometimes, by accident, I knocked down the whole thing by myself; that was really embarrassing. And sometimes, I must admit, I would tear it down on purpose.

If the building were especially grand, I would plead with my mother to let it stay standing in the middle of the room. Surely, I thought, everyone would want to admire it, even the company coming for dinner that night.

But the buildings never stood for long. Ultimately, not one stone would be left on another. The same thing happened when I built roads and houses in the sandbox. The castles would stay for a while there, but the nights and rains would ultimately wash them away. The same thing happened at the beach in the summer time, when I molded grand sand castles. If the tide did not wash away those masterpieces, animals and human beings would crush them.

I remember sadness when those building block castles came crashing down. All of us, no matter how old we are, all of us, have great buildings around us that will ultimately fall. We don't like to imagine it. We certainly don't like to plan for it. But, ultimately, we know our buildings will fail - for some reason or another. Even if we've managed to keep it up on the

living room for several days, we know one day it will be gone.

That's how Jesus reacted when his disciples were admiring the grandeur of the great temple in first century Jerusalem. Apparently, it was, indeed, a tremendous structure, and a suitable symbol of God's greatness and glory.

But Jesus knew it would one day fall. He could not say for sure when it would be. But he knew it would be a cataclysmic event, an awful event. It would seem like the end of the world itself. It would seem like everything his people had ever worked for, would be gone.

But Jesus also knew that the temple's destruction would not mean the end of God's creation; and it would not mean the end of salvation. He urged people to bear suffering with hope and patience. His lesson was that all of us suffer, and all of us go through destruction and tearing down. All of us even go through death, but that is not the end. He died himself, but it was not the end. He was resurrected, and God's creative power began again.

I remember something else when my castle fell. I remember how wonderful it was actually building the houses. For me, the real joy was seeing an empty living room floor and setting about the construction. What fun it is to build! The fun of creation is just that. It is in the creating, not just in the admiring.

We gather today in a beautiful structure, this wonderful cathedral. Look around you! Look at what large stones! Do you see this great building? It is like a temple, large and roomy and beautiful, a great sign of God's openness and grandeur. We do our best to maintain, fixing leaks and patching holes. I don't even want to think of any of this place falling down or being destroyed.

But I do want to say that this architectural structure is not the ultimate focus of our worship. Jesus was clear, later in his ministry, that when the temple was destroyed, he would build it up in three days. That statement was a puzzle to his disciples until they realized he was talking about the temple of himself, his body, his very identity.

When we gather in church, when we take communion in church, there is something greater than the building here. That which is greater is Jesus Christ himself.

Do you see Jesus here? Look around you again. Look at these large stones and buildings! Do you see the building, or do you see the people? Look at what large people! Wonderful people!

In a few minutes, we will bless bread and wine at the altar. Then we will come up and eat a small piece of the bread and drink a small sip of the wine. Food and drink. That food and drink are really building blocks.

With that bread and wine, God is actually building a temple greater than this cathedral. God is actually growing the Body of Christ. Where is Jesus Christ today? The body of Jesus Christ is actually us! The Body of Christ is really the church, us, the community of believers and worshipers and servers!

The fun part of the church is not sitting around admiring how pretty it looks or how good we feel. The fun part of church is in building up the body of Christ.

I am sure God enjoys our physical cathedrals and temples. But I believe God loves to build up the body of Christ. God loves our learning and our serving, our hugging and crying and laughing. God loves our walking up to the altar and being fed the food and drink of new life. With all that we do here, God is creating and having fun. God is building us into a living temple, the Body of Christ.

AMEN.

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