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Grace and Holy Trinity
February 16,2020

For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

We don't have this tradition at GHTC, but around the church, there is a relatively new tradition of star words being distributed for the feast of the Epiphany. This year a friend of mine serving in a methodist church offered to send "star words" to anyone who didn't do this in their home parish, and she sent me one per my request. The word I now hold for 2020, in my prayers and in my thoughts for the year is "building." Building is both a noun and a verb, which makes it a beautifully fluid spiritual touchstone for a year. So far, it has been showing up in all kinds of places, and I can't wait to see what this word illumines for me the rest of the year, because today the building is the foundation of this sermon.

Not surprisingly, this phrase jumped out at me this week- You are God's building. As a congregation, as a person, as a community of faith, as a physical plant, you (plural) are God's building. Building as both a stalwart symbol of God's love for the world, while at the same time being a work in progress. As we work together, we are both the servants and the field, the builders, and the building.

In today's reading in the letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded of this, that we are God's beloved, and we are beloved by God. We do not belong to one disciple or congregation or tradition, we are God's and God's alone, and God is working in us and through us at all times and in all places, not just here at 8 N Laurel Street.

This is a time of building in this congregation, even though we aren't in a capital campaign, or a strategic planning period, we are in a time of building. Building up one another holding one another, and figuring out how to be God's

building in this 21st-century world. Every generation is building upon the foundations which another has lain (laid?).

Christ himself, in this excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount, builds upon lessons taught by Moses, Isaiah, elders, and prophets who came before him. This is why he uses the literary mode which he does in today's Gospel- you have heard it said ... but...

To our modern ears, it can be heard as reprimand and exclusion. As a matter of fact, I have heard this selection from the Gospel preached out of context and used to belittle if not blame the victims of abuse, violence, bigotry, and hatred for the behavior of their abusers. What person here hasn't been judged or judged someone based on the thought that their attire might attract lustful eyes? I know that I continue to hear comments about the way that Shakira and Jennifer Lopez dressed during the halftime show at the Superbowl, all of which are tinged with that very sentiment.

But in reality, Jesus is saying is the commandments not to murder, or to commit adultery, or to divorce one's wife are baselines for behavior. These are the least we can do for one another. Jesus is building upon this foundation and saying most of us don't degrade one another, abuse one another, or deny one another. But nor should we even tread lightly into space where we belittle, neglect, or dismiss one another. This passage reminds us that it is our own behaviors and not only our behaviors but our intentions, which allow us to build communities of faith and hope. Without recognizing our biases, our foundational beliefs, and the motivations for our behaviors, we can begin to blame other people for our own sins.

Christianity as a lived faith is relational, one that is built on the love and respect of God, and by extension, love, and respect for all of God's creation. We are part of that creation, and we are also stewards who are responsible for God's creation. We are the building.

We are not this building. We are a constantly changing configuration of relationships that are built and rebuilt with God and one another. I can't help but imagine us as the glass shards in a kaleidoscope, which forms a different beautiful mosaic with each shift in our experience. Light and movement at play in this community of faithful believers.

This week we have been shaken. Some of us were closer than others to our sister, Lisa, who took her own life last week. We have begun in small ways to rebuild a relationship with God and one another by calling one another throughout the week, texting, emailing, and in general, holding one another together as best we can. We continue this process by coming together to talk, pray, and cry today after the 11 am service today. It is not easy to build and rebuild build and rebuild ourselves. Despite what we may believe, we are not actually doing the work. Instead, God works in and on us. Continually, God builds us up in joy and sorrow,

life, and death, in all the aspects of who we are, and what we do, and how we see the world.

When we hear Jesus teaching today, I encourage us to take it as the scaffolding around our own hearts and minds allowing us to disassemble some of the long-held beliefs which feel foundational. Which gives Christ-followers the illusion that because we don't go out murdering our enemies, or cheating on our spouses or leaving our former spouses to suffer and beg in the streets, that we really aren't that bad, and we don't have to think about our own sins. I say this clearly - our sins are our own, no one else is responsible for our behavior, nor our thoughts no one else is responsible for us - regardless of who they are, how they dress, or how we feel about them. We are given the gift of free will, which also curses us with the responsibility for our actions.

This is where we have worked hard as an institution to establish sacramental practices helping us to recognize God's faithfulness and

grace in our lives. We observe the sacraments so that we can encounter grace in ordinary ways, we confess our sins and are absolved by God, and we rebuild our relationships in stronger, more resilient ways. Our thoughts, words, and deeds do not condemn us to a life that is separate from the love of God, the love of one another, and the love of creation. Instead, our thoughts words and deeds invite us to tear down and then rebuild our lives so that we can always strive to be more like the God whose image we bear into the world.

Let us hear that when we hear the rhetorical device of - you've heard it said but... Jesus is not rebuking us for our sins but instead inviting us to be better. Encouraging us to build and rebuild our relationships with one another in mutually respectful and even more so in loving ways. We are God's building. A work in progress, always striving to be more like God who loves us so much that they made us in their own image to bring love, mercy, and justice to the world.

Let us be the building. Let us be the rebuilding as well.

Amen