

Rev Sally's Sermon
July 18, 2021

A few years ago, I traveled to Italy. When in Rome, it seemed that at every turn our guide said, "And this location was once a Temple to a Roman god." We even visited the Pantheon, which before it was a Christian Church, was a temple to many of the Roman gods. During the days of the Roman Empire, it was believed that the god lived in his Temple – it was the god's domain. And if you wanted to please that god, you would make sacrificial offerings at his temple.

In today's Old Testament lesson, we hear that King David wanted to build a temple to the Lord. Many of the nations around Israel had their own gods. These gods had temples. So, I'm sure it seemed right to David that his God should have a temple also. Having a Temple was a comfort to the people. It provided them something to touch. It gave them a way to understand their God. It may also have given them a sense of control over God. But the Lord God tells David "No". "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" You can hear the irony in that question – The idea of confining God – the creator of heaven and earth – to a building was impossible. But the Lord does have a plan. Instead of his temple being a house made with bricks and mortar, the Lord desires to dwell among his people. The people of Israel will be his temple. They will be the house of God.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, we hear a similar vision for the early Christian Church. The first followers of Jesus were trying to understand how they were called to live – who they were called to be. Paul reminds them that in Jesus Christ, they were now one with all Jesus' disciples – even those who had previously been their enemies. And together, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they were now meant to be one body – the household of God – the holy temple of the Lord. God's promise was that when they came together as one, their lives, their community would be the dwelling place of God. This is what it means to be the church.

Sometimes though, like with King David, it's tempting to focus on the physical building. Many years ago, long before I went to seminary, I was a member of a congregation in Charlotte that was just starting. St. Margaret's. We were a community of people. We didn't have a building. Instead, we borrowed a Lutheran church's building on Sunday afternoons for our services. Eventually we saved our money, and we did build a building. After we dedicated that building, lots of new people came to join us. I remember hearing one new person comment, "I'm glad they decided to build a new Episcopal Church here." Though I wasn't very

theologically informed at the time, I knew this statement wasn't correct. Even before that building was built, we were the Church of Jesus Christ, the community of God's people. The dwelling place of God isn't the brick-and-mortar structure. Instead, the dwelling place of God is his people.

When God's Holy Spirit dwells among his people, they are bound together into a community. This is what the Greek word for Church "ecclesia" means – "community". We see this community starting to be formed in today's Gospel reading from Mark. Jesus' followers, his disciples, were coming together. Jesus taught them. He fed them with the presence of God. Then he sent them out. Notice that here they are called apostles. This term means one who is sent by another with a message. These apostles are sent out. They take the message of God's kingdom out into the world. They proclaim and teach. They anoint and heal. They bring the life and love of Jesus to his people. This is what it means to be the dwelling place of God. This is what it means to be the Church.

This is our inheritance also. We also are called to be the dwelling place of God. So, what does this look like for us today? First it means being a community, pulling together the people of God into one body. It involves an inter-connectedness, a realization that we depend on each other. As we live in this community, we are shaped and formed as God's people. We learn from each other. We hear God speak through each other. We know God's loving presence through one another. Second, being the community of God means inviting others in. It is not a closed community. Instead, it is a place where others are invited in to meet Jesus, to be formed themselves as his disciples. Finally, being the community of God means being sent out to do God's work in God's world. It means serving God's people through the actions of our lives. I see this community right here. I see it today, as we worship God together. I saw it last week as we came together for vacation Bible School. Children having fun with each other. Adults using their gifts for ministry to serve God's people. And I see this body of Christ as we work together to serve those beyond this building. As we collect food for the hungry, as we prepare meals for the homeless. As we provide school supplies for the children of our community.

When we live in community, God's life will be evident. God's life will be visible to all. And when we live in God's community the Church, God will dwell among his people, and we will be the Temple of the Lord.