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"IS A MIGHTY FORTRESS OUR GOD?"
I Corinthians 3:10-17

Recently, on PBS, a program series aired about myth, from the viewpoint of one, Joseph Campbell. Early in the series Campbell made this point; that the attitude of any particular age is reflected in its architecture. When an age is particularly concerned with the things of religion, great cathedrals and abbeys are constructed to reflect that concern. The buildings of the middle ages, the great cathedrals of Chutney and Notre Dame Abbey at Mont St. Michel, reflect just such a time. When the politics of nations are of primary concern, palaces of Renaissance, Versailles, and Blenheim Palace in England reflect that political emphasis. And today, the many storied World Trade Center buildings, the Sears Tower, the John Hancock Building and so on, reflect our modern day interest in big business. What's the tallest building in Milwaukee? A bank building.

Our church building, though carrying a tall steeple so the community can be reminded that we are here, is, at least in this room where we worship, a one story building. Were we to gaze upon a contemporary 100 story church, I'm not sure whether we'd be impressed or embarrassed.

Do you know how the term 'story' for levels of a building came into use? First of all, the word story comes from the same Latin word from which we get the word 'history'. And in earlier architecture, the facades of buildings would have a history of story carved in stone at each level of the building. And so a three level building would have three complete stories carved into its facade--and so it would be a three story building.

We are a one story building. In more ways than one. Beyond the architecture, we are a one story building because we are a one story people. And that is because we are all characters in the story of God's people. Though we bring many different readings to that divine story, we all share in the one story.

When we gather in this place, the hope is that we will hear that story--the story of those who have sought to grow in relationship with God and have come to seek that growth by way of the life and teachings of Jesus. We sing the story, we read the story in our scriptures, we symbolize the story in events like baptism--but most importantly, we live the story. The story of Pilgrims seeking the Kingdom.

We sang a hymn earlier, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Now I've never liked Fortress imagery. I see God not as a confining protector as much as an encouraging parent. And the question that the sermon title asks "Is a mighty fortress our God?" is simply a play on words to ask the

question, do we in the church idolize the buildings we gather in, rather than worship the one to whom they are dedicated. It's a question directed to those who might find the value of the church resting in her building, an apparently lasting achievement, rather than in her people, who seem to come and go. But, though part of the story of God's people takes place in this one story building, the participants continue the story far outside these walls and will long after these walls are gone.

We dare not idolize the buildings we meet in. Beware if you find yourself encouraging your friends to visit our church because it's so pretty. In the book of the prophet, Jeremiah, the word of the Lord is this,

"Woe to him...(who) says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.

"Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord."

We are a people of one story--the story of God's creative and involved love. Indeed, we in and of ourselves are one-story buildings, as Paul said--temples of God, founded on the Christ. Carry that story of God's creative and involved love and share it through your lives. The story goes on and on and you are the characters, and you are building the truly great buildings that will glorify God. In acts of Love, the kingdom begins to take shape...and that will be a truly lasting and glorious achievement and that is what our one story is about! One story people--share it. Will you join with me in prayer?

Lord, God, grant us the wisdom to see what truly builds up your people; grant us the courage to follow your leading; and grant us your peace as we seek to do your will. In Christ's name, we pray, Amen.