

“All weekend the two girls were calling each other Temple One and Temple Two, shaking with laughter and getting so red and hot that they were positively ugly, particularly Joann who had spots on her face anyway. They came in the brown convent uniforms they had to wear at Mount St. Scholastica but as soon as they opened their suitcases, they took off the uniforms and put on their Sunday shoes and walked around in the high heels all over the house, always passing the long mirror in the hall slowly to get a look at their legs.”

Flannery O’Conner begins her marvelous short story, *A Temple of the Holy Ghost*, with this vivid image. Naturally, we want to know why Su-zan and Joanne are referring to each other in this way, and so does the mother.

“She asked them why they called each other Temple One and Temple Two and this sent them off into gales of giggles. Finally they managed to explain. Sister Perpetua, the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy in Mayville, had given them a lecture on what to do if a young man should – here they laughed so hard they were not able to go on without going back to the beginning – on what to do if a young man should – they put their heads in their laps – on what to do if – they finally manated to shout it out – if he should ‘behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile.’ Sister Perpetua said they were to say, ‘Stop Sir! I am a temple of the Holy Ghost.’ And that would put an end to it.”

I expect it would, come to think of it.

“Her mother didn’t laugh at what they said. ‘I think you girls are pretty silly,’ she said.

‘After all, that’s what you are – temples of the Holy Ghost.’<sup>1</sup>

That seems to be ripped straight from Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, doesn’t it?

The thing is, though, it’s not.

It is a wonderful thing to see one another as God’s handiwork.

And we are just that. Everyone of us, made by God, made just the way God wants us, is God’s handiwork.

The implications of that belief run deep as well.

Think of what that says about how we view each other with regard to race and ethnicity.

Think of what that says about the ways in which we view ourselves – and perhaps treat ourselves without kindness – in ways ranging from substance abuse to emotional abuse of our own selves – to risky sexual practices – the list can go on pretty much indefinitely.

There are any number of ways that we can make a mockery of the reality that we are God’s handiwork.

But that is not what Paul is writing about here.

“You” is plural.

“You” refers to the whole church.

Y’all would be more accurate.

(For what it’s worth, I had a Hebrew professor from Singapore who liked to use y’all as the plural in teaching Hebrew. He said it kept things clear. He never opined on the compound plural or the plural possessive.)

Y’all are the temple of the Holy Ghost.

When Paul would have been writing, there was still a temple in Jerusalem, and the temple

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<sup>1</sup> Flannery O’Conner [A Good Man is Hard to Find](#). (Harvest, Orlando, 1976) pp81-83

was where everything of significance took place.

And to that reality, Paul introduced a new reality: in Jesus Christ, the temple in Jerusalem is no longer where all the significant things of the world took place.

No, now the temple where everything of significance takes place is the temple of God's own people.

Twice this past week, the begat passages of the Bible have come up. You know the one's I'm talking about: they go, "So and so begat so and so, who begat so and so..."

I am not the one who brought up the begat passages, by the way, someone else did in each case, and I do recognize that most of the time, looking at the begat passages in the Bible is an exercise in tedium.

The truth is, though, that I sort of like those begat passage because they show – by name – the way that God uses God's people to continue the story of redemption in the world. God uses God's people to get God's way in the world.

We are called, each of us, and all of us together, to be God's temple, to be where the significant things of the world are taking place.

In fact, if nothing significant is taking place in your life, let me invite you to seek and find some significance in your life through the work you do for God.

I love the back of these t-shirts. I love them because it's a bunch of verbs.

You know nothing ever happens without verbs, right?

Let's just scroll through them:

Advocating. Assembling. Attending Fundraisers. Building. Canned Food Drives. Caring.

Collecting. Cooking. Delivering. Diaper Drive. Distributing. Donating. Driving.

Interacting. Listening. Loving. Mitten Tree. Painting. Planting. Playing. Proclaiming.

Repairing. Roofing. Serving on Boards. Sorting. Tutoring. Washing cars.

All of it is significant.

And what's more, it is the way in which God's temple is being built. We are the Temple of the Holy Ghost.

This is the first half of the sermon. You are going to write the second half. You are going to write the second half of this sermon with your lives... Because the season of service is Morningside Presbyterian Church being the temple of the Holy Ghost. And while we finish highlighting service this month with the video celebration in the Fellowship Hall after church, it's not over. It's not ever over.

I know I've shared with you before the rabbinic wisdom that teaches that God always leaves creation just a little bit unfinished so that we can participate in God's work in the world.

You get to write the second half of this sermon. I hope it will be a good one.

So I'm not going to say "Amen" now before we sing the hymn. You know what "Amen" means, don't you? It means, "Let it be so," or "So be it." No, let's go downstairs after the last hymn and watch the video and then let's think of how we're going to be the temple of the Holy Ghost in the world. Then we can say "Amen" together, as God's temple. We can say "Amen" as a prayer – that the verbs we live may indeed be so in the world.