

Welcome

Seattle is host to the Museum of Pop Culture, which used to be called the Experience Music Project. It was founded in 2000 as a celebration of contemporary pop culture. Renowned architect Frank Gehry was commissioned to design the building, and what he came up with was this.

[EMP 1]

As the project was dedicated originally to music, Gehry claimed he took his inspiration from pictures of guitars and, maybe, from the look of the building, rock musicians' penchant for smashing them. Whatever the inspiration, the building was not been well-received. Forbes called it one of the 10 ugliest buildings in the world. Another critic described it as a 'blob'. Maybe the nicest thing that was said about it was from a local writer who said, "Gehry has designed some wonderful buildings... but his Seattle effort is not one of them."

In the two decades it's been part of the Seattle skyline, of course the city has warmed to it. No one likes it, exactly, but it's become sort of like that weird uncle at the family reunion - he's strange, but harmless, and hey - he's family.

Suffice to say this is the danger of architecture as art... it doesn't matter how many great buildings you're responsible for. Sometimes your vision just doesn't land the way you hoped it would. You want a smashed-guitar music museum and you build a blob.

I know we don't have a lot of architects here this morning, but I bet you know how Frank Gehry felt if he read any of those reviews. It's frustrating when what you put so much work into doesn't communicate what you want it to.

I want to think specifically today about our spiritual life. After all, you're here, which means you're putting work into building your faith. So it's worth asking: what exactly are we building? What is the goal of our faith? After all, if we're going to put work in, don't we want to be sure we're building something great?

Message

We're in a series called "A Faith that's Built to Last". For the next month, we are asking, "What are the essential components of a strong faith? How do we build a faith that can weather the storms of life? A faith that keeps us secure no matter what comes our way, a faith that is open and courageous. How do we get that kind of faith that makes us infectious, that person who has a deep love of God, a person you just want to be around. A person who is actively making their world a better place.

[Scripture Slide 1] We're in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. This is a letter to a young congregation - maybe only a couple of years old at this point. And the Apostle Paul, who planted the church, is writing to address some cracks he's noticed in their congregation. Paul uses a building metaphor to advise the Corinthian

Christians on what they need to grow stronger. Last week, Ashley introduced us to the foundation of our faith - Jesus.

When we say "Jesus is our foundation," we're making a powerful claim: that we enter into a life of faith because God sought us out. Our faith isn't about how good we can be, how many rules we follow or how hard we work. A strong faith, a true faith, a faith that's built to last is built on nothing but what Jesus has done for us.

Today, we need to ask "what's next?" What kind of building are we building on the foundation? What is the shape of our faith?

To answer that question is a little more complicated, and we need to hang out in a weird leap of logic Paul makes in his letter. If you were here last week, you remember the Corinthians were divided - Paul had founded the church, but he was gone, and another guy named Apollos was there now. The church was divided about who was teaching the whole truth, and rather than take sides, Paul chastised them for thinking there were sides to choose. With that in mind, let's read his words to the Corinthian Christians. Listen for the two different metaphors he uses:

I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. -- 1 Cor 3:6-10

You are God's field. You are God's building. Those two things don't immediately go together in your mind, do they? Like if we were playing word association and I said, "Field," how many words would you say before "building"? I'm guessing quite a few.

But in Paul's mind, those two ideas are intrinsically linked. The kind of building we're building on that foundation of Jesus' love for us is somehow tied up in a well-cultivated field for Paul.

For a faithful Jewish man like Paul, there's an obvious place that a well-cultivated field and a building are intimately connected: the creation stories.

I know... what? None of us is an ancient faithful Jewish person. We're disconnected from the worldview of the Scriptures such that we miss what was obvious to Paul.

[Scripture Slide 2] The cultivated field is probably the easier piece of Paul's logic to follow. We call a cultivated field a farm or, if it's smaller, a garden. And there's a pretty famous garden in the Bible - way back in Genesis 2.

Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made... The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. -- Genesis 2:7-8, 15

In one of the creation stories of the Jewish people, the earth is a garden in which God placed us with a specific calling: tend and watch over the garden. Cultivate the earth. Farm.

But notice God planted the garden. So when Genesis 2 calls us gardeners, it's reaching beyond the literal to point to a deeper spiritual reality: to be human is to imitate God. God's a gardener, we're gardeners. God's a farmer, we're farmers.

When Paul describes us as a cultivated field that God makes to grow, this is the image in his mind. He intends to tie us to the creation story in Genesis 2.

[Scripture Slide 3] But what about calling us a building? Believe it or not, Jewish ideas about creation tie buildings and gardens together. Flip back to Isaiah 66 with me. When we think of the world, we think of a round ball floating in space, orbiting the sun. For ancient peoples in the Near East - Israel, Mesopotamia, Egypt - the earth wasn't a planet floating in space. It was literally a cosmic temple created by their gods.

Isaiah 66 reflects this understanding of the world:

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that? Could you build me such a resting place? -- Isaiah 66:1

So the creation story in Genesis 1 is one that has God creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. It's the one that begins "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." If you were an ancient Jew like Paul, you heard the story of God creating a cosmic temple.

When Paul read stories in the Bible about Solomon building a temple, or when Paul visited the temple in Jerusalem, he understood this earthly temple to be a reflection of the cosmic temple that is the world.

To worship at a temple was to kneel at the foot of the throne of the creator of the universe. The local temple was like a doorway to heaven, an airlock, the spot where heaven and earth overlapped.

Creation is a temple. A temple is an image of creation.

Creation is both a building and a cultivated field.

So, back to 1 Corinthians 3. Paul says, "You are God's field. You are God's building. Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. -- 1 Cor 3:6-10

Paul says, You want to know what you're building on that foundation I laid? It's a temple - God's building and God's field. God's garden and God's home.

A life of faith is one where we become the place where heaven and earth meet. A life of faith means we hear Jesus' call for us to be co-laborers, to cultivate the world alongside Jesus.

As a church, that looks like the work we're doing in our community. In just a couple of weeks, we're joining our city Trunk or Treat.

Next month, we're collecting food for Life Message's annual Thanksgiving drive.

In December, we have our Rowlett Reindeer and Advent offerings.

Each of these is a chance for us to join in what God is doing in our community and our world. A chance to tend the garden God has planted, to cultivate peace, hope and love. To build a world that's beautiful for everyone.

So the question Paul asks is: What are you building on the foundation of faith? Remember that our foundation is Jesus himself, God making the first move in creating a relationship with us.

What are you building?

Some of us build towers. We see the world as a dangerous, scary place and we want to protect our own, so we turn inward and try to keep others out. But God's temple is open to all, welcoming everyone to encounter their creator.

Some of us build platforms. We want acclaim, recognition. We want to be the top of our field, the best at the company. So we dedicate ourselves to climbing higher and higher. But God's temple is *God's* temple. We worship the creator, not ourselves.

Some of us build forts. We're angry, and we want to go on the attack. We want to be right, to be certain. But the fruit of faith is peace, not war. God's temple is to be a blessing for the world, not a waged attack.

If you were to step back from your life and ask, "What am I building?" what would your answer be? Are you building a temple? Is your life a place where heaven and earth overlap, where people can encounter Jesus?

Is the garden of your life growing fruit like love, joy and peace-making? Do you offer those around you patience, kindness and generosity? Are you known for faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

Paul challenges us to consider what we're building, because we can invest a whole lot of work into building the wrong sort of faith. (And don't worry - we'll talk next week about what to do when that happens.) But when God called you to a life of faith, God called you to our original human purpose. We were created to be God's partners in caring for each other and for the world.

God calls you a partner, a co-laborer. Jesus invites you to a deep relationship with him, one that changes not only you, but the world around you.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Jesus invites us to become co-workers with his good work.

1. In the last week, what has your faith produced in your life?
2. From the outside, what does it look like you're building?
3. How can you build God's temple this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Discussion: What does your faith look like from the outside?