

# Main Street UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **1 Corinthians 3:5-17** **“A New Church In A Tough Town”**

July 17, 2016  
(9<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**I CORINTHIANS 3:5-17**  
**"A NEW CHURCH IN A TOUGH TOWN"**

Answers 1:13, *Is Christ divided?* No

**IMAGES**  
 5 Q1, Q2  
 Servants

**1) v.5 TWO QUESTIONS & ANSWER: THE CHURCH'S SERVANT-LEADERS/ PASTORS.**  
**What then is Paul? And what is Apollos?** Not *who* but *what*? Pastors are servants, not status symbols  
 Servants (*diakono*i = table waiters) *through whom* you believed, Not *in whom!* 9:16, 4:15 Leader: servant/evangelist  
 as the Lord assigned to each.\* No personal credit, Don't overestimate, God assigns the chores, Not competitors  
 \* = God's Action, Mk. 9:35 Lk. 17:7-10, Rom. 10:14-27, "How shall they hear?"

**2) vv.6-8 IMAGE 1: AGRICULTURE ANALOGY ON CHURCH LEADERSHIP.**  
 Church is a work in progress! Acts 18:1 (Paul), 18:17 (Apollos)

**FIELD**  
 6  
 Farmers

**a) vv.6-7 The Picture Of A Garden: The Relative Unimportance Of Workers.** 1QS 8.5  
 1 I planted, Level 1, 2 Cor. 9:10, No lone rangers/superstars, Church is a local, organic community  
 2 Apollos watered, Level 2, Advance the work, Apostles as plow boys, water boys: both necessary  
 3 but **GOD** gives the increase.\* Level 3: Harvest, Ps. 127:1, Picture No. 1: Church = God's field

7  
 1'  
 2'  
 3'

So neither is he who plants anything, Leaders come & go, Fruitless, useless apart from God, proper proportion  
 nor he who waters, *plant/water* are aorists (past completed action), *gives* is imperfect (continuing)  
 but God who gives the increase (is everything).\* God is source of success, Isaiah 5:1-7  
 Real miracle/mystery is fruit/growth! God as life-force

8a  
 b

**b) v.8 Test And Reward: Focus On Individual's Labor.** No complacency  
 Now the one who plants and the one who waters are equal (i.e. one), Complementary, co-workers  
 and each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.\* p.v., v.5b, No turf battles, wrong audience  
 It is God who finally evaluates, *Test. of Abraham* 13:11-14 on reward

**3) v.9 ANALOGIES APPLIED TO LEADERS AND THE PEOPLE.**  
 No clergy turf battles! Workers are indispensable! Leader: Fellow-Workers

Fellow-Workers  
 9

For God's we are,\* fellow workers (*sunergoi*/ synergists); //v.5, I Thess. 3:2 on Timothy  
 Work in progress, The church, leaders and people, belongs to God  
 God's (cultivated) field,\* //vv.6-8, Ex. 15:17, *Jer. 1:10* (2 images together). 12:14-16 on these two images  
 God's building are you.\* vv.10-15, //1QS 8.5, 11.7-8 Picture No. 2: Church = God's building  
 All belongs to God (3x): God's workers, field, building!

**FIELD**  
**BUILDING**

**2') vv.10-15 IMAGE 2: ARCHITECTURAL ANALOGY ON CHURCH LEADERSHIP.**  
 Too high or a too low view of ministers hurts the church

10  
 Builders

**a) vv.10-11 The Picture Of A Building And Architect: The Importance Of Quality.**  
 1 According to the grace (*charis*, gift) of God given to me,\* Rom. 1:5, 15:8-21, I Cor. 2:1-5, Acts 18:1-8  
 like a wise (*sophos*) master builder (*archi-tectos*) I laid a foundation, Is. 28:16, Leader: Architects /builders  
 2 and another man is building upon it. Multiple leaders are necessary  
 2' Let each man take care how he builds upon it. Warning against shoddy pastoral work  
 1' For other foundation can no one lay 1QS 11.7-8, I Cor. 1:7, 23, 2:2  
 than that which is laid (i.e. by God) which is **JESUS CHRIST**.\* p.v., 1:17, 23, 2:2-3  
 Solidity of the work is tested; if on Christ, it survives

11

**b) vv.12-15 Test And Reward: Focus On Two Types Of Materials.** Ex. 35:30-36:1

12

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with: 8:1, Creator of the church is also its judge, truth revealed  
 1 gold, silver, precious stones, Temples, 1 Chron. 29:2, Worthy of foundation/ inflammable  
 2 wood, hay, stubble (reeds), Descending value, Ordinary homes, cheap, easily available/ flammable  
 3 the work of each will become manifest; p.v., 9:1, Is. 66:15, Church & leaders examined/ nothing hidden  
 4 *for* the Day will disclose it,\* Cataclysm coming! 2 Thess. 1:7-8, Mal. 4:1-2a, 2 Pt. 3:7, 12  
 because it will be revealed by fire; p.v., Purgation/Test, Prov. 27:21, Rom. 2:5,16; Amos 5:18  
 3' what sort of work each has done, 2 Cor. 5:10, Poor Materials + Poor Work = Junk  
 4' the fire will test it. 2 Pt. 3:12, 2 Thess. 1:7-8, All our work is mixed, Not punish but reveal

14

15

1' If anyone's work survives which he has built, he shall receive a reward.\* 4:5, *Testament of Abraham* 13  
 2' If anyone's work shall be burned down, he shall suffer loss (i.e. be fined). See James 3:1 on judgment  
 (Though he himself shall be saved, but only *as* through fire.)\* p.v., Simile, Corrects misunderstanding, Amos 4:11  
 Wait for God's judgment, 1 Cor. 4:5, 2 Cor. 5:10, Rom. 2:6-10

Q1, Q2

**1') vv.16-17 TWO QUESTIONS & ANSWER: THE HOLINESS & VALUE OF COMMUNITY.**

16 a  
**TEMPLE**  
 17

**Do you not know that you (2<sup>nd</sup> pl.) are God's temple?** 6:19, 1 Kgs. 6:17, *Naos*, Picture No. 3: Church = inner temple  
**and that the SPIRIT OF GOD dwells in you" (pl.)?\*** 2 Cor. 6:16, Spirit dwells in Christ's community!  
 c If any one the temple of God destroys, 6:19-20, Theat/curse of God on division/schism  
 c' destroyed he will be by God.\* Insiders, How we treat the community is how God treats us  
 b For God's temple is holy (i.e. set apart), Mt. 16:18, The church belongs to God! Not pastors, not people!  
 a' and that *temple* you (pl.) are! *Naos* = sacred, inner part, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21, We are where God works!

## A NEW CHURCH IN A TOUGH TOWN

*"For God's we are, fellow workers...."*

Junior colleagues in a much larger operation.

### I C O R I N T H I A N S 3 : 9

A lot has happened since last I saw you, some of it delightful, some tragic, much of it educational and inspiring, some positively hair-raising, like leaving Istanbul early Friday morning and then later that same day seeing footage of city squares you'd walked less than twenty-four hours earlier raked with helicopter gunfire.

Much has transpired in twelve days, some of it shocking, some of it pure providence, and all of it leaving a mark on me, a fresh awareness of our world's historical and cultural and religious complexity and the necessity for the church to do the one thing for which we were designed to do, which is not to have a quick answer for every dilemma but simply to *be the church*, whether in the pain of Minneapolis or Baton Rouge or Dallas or the aged splendor of Rome or the refugee camps of the Greek isles or the sensual underground of Paris or the complexity of Istanbul where Post-Christian Europe and a committed Muslim Middle East grind together on tectonic plates across the Bosphorus or right here in Greenwood. *To be God's people, the people who together keep following Jesus Christ no matter what happens to them or around them:* that is our purpose. To endure in this great love of the Triune God and in this great mission to the world starting right where you are. This is who we are, and this is what we do, and to go away for a fortnight is to see it from a new wide angle.

Did you know there's an *Imca Camp* in Greenville. Trajan's Forum is a complex of ruins in central Rome that date to the early second century. On a

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 4**

day that ended with Lori sighing, “I’ve seen about enough statues for one day,” we ran across a cappuccino colored young woman with an expensive camera. Just the three of us at a balcony overlooking the huge site and her clicking away. And when I asked- since she looked Italian, “Are you from Rome?” her answer was, “No, Seville. I’m a Spanish graduate student in architecture.”

And when she asked, “And where are you from?” Lori answered, “Greenwood, SC.”

“Oh,” she said– eyes bright– I went to camp in Green.... *Imca Camp.*”

“Do you mean Camp Greenville?” I asked.

“No,” she said with increasing conviction, “*Imca Camp.*”

I was puzzled. *Imca Camp*, what is that? Then, using a skill set Lori taught me about reading personalized license plates, I sounded the letters to myself one at a time, “I-M-C-A.” I looked at her and smiled, “You mean *YMCA* Camp.” She exploded with a smile, “Yes, *Imca Camp.*” I did the motions to the song and sang the chorus. She mimicked me and began to dance. Lori stood in sheer amazement. It was a moment of discovery for us all.

It was hard to hear about the shootings in Dallas, the terrorism in Nice, and the eruption of the Turkish coup. News of death was everywhere and every day. But this is our world, and I again realized how our American isolation, largely due to our geography between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, isolates us from much of the world’s chaos, though not all of it.

More than once I entered into animated discussions with Brits and Aussies and Kiwis we met who asked– sometimes in anger, “Why do your police hate blacks?” or “What are you going to do about the guns?” and when I asked the Greeks and Turks to tell me about the Syrian refugees I heard a much different spin than I get from our media. And it hit me, “We are as wrong about them as they are about us,” so we need to do more than watch the tube; we need to talk to one another face to face whenever we get an opportunity. I watched so much of the BBC last week I soon had my fake British accent back. Lori and I marveled at the speed at which they changed Prime Ministers and how witty and precise both David Cameron and Theresa May were. It was then that Lori asked, “Why can’t we have a nine week Presidential campaign? Ours wears me out.” And when I recommended some readings on comparative governments, the Parliamentary and the Republic, she was not at all interested.

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 5**

And what an opportunity we had for dialog last Sunday. I got up early and went over the Greek Orthodox basilica in Athens for a 7:00am service, but no one was there; it was just for the priests, so I sat amidst the icons and prayed for you. So at 10:30 Lori and I showed up at St. Paul’s Anglican Church at the foot of the Acropolis which is part of the Church of England of which the Queen remains the head.<sup>1</sup> They do not have the same separation we do here.

Father Malcolm Bradshaw was the priest, tall and thin, about seventy years old and British to the core. When the usher said to me after handing me a bulletin, “Carry on,” I knew I was back among my ancestors. Only the week before Pastor Bradshaw had been to Buckingham Palace to received the M.B.E. from Princess Anne; he’s now a *Member of the British Empire* for seventeen years service as a priest in Italy and now an equal amount in Greece and that day there was read in church a letter from the Bishop of Europe as to what Brexit means for the churches. The message was simple, “Do not fear. Stay faithful in the midst of change. Serve the Lord and be patient.” Wisdom indeed.

There were maybe fifty people in the small Gothic structure, and I confess to weeping throughout the first hymn, written by Charles Wesley, “Soldiers of Christ Arise.”<sup>2</sup> I took it as the Lord’s own gift to me, since I am a son of the Wesley brothers in my faith. He preached on the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, and it was a powerful call to love and serve the stranger. It pierced my heart to hear this strong and gentle man preach out of the text and his own frustration with how little help was coming their way from the EU in this exhausting work, including only recently a thousand hygiene kits they had assembled for men in the camps.

During his message I recognized one of the scholars to whom his sermon research was indebted, and when I asked at the door, “Are you familiar with the work of Dr. Kenneth Bailey of the American University in Beirut,” he knowingly smiled and said, “Yes, we’ve met several times.” He knew what I was asking and chuckled when I said I was from one of the former colonies and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://anglicanchurchathens.gr>.

<sup>2</sup> *The U.M. Hymnal*, No. 513.

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 6**

that a British accent was good for a least twenty I.Q. points in South Carolina, and particularly in Charleston!

It was good not to have to lead or preach that Sunday and to receive holy communion from their team. It was the same order of worship we use, and all the prayers were heartfelt and reached from where they served to around the world. On a side wall was a marble plaque to honor members of the R.A.F, the Royal Navy and Army who died defending Greece against the Nazis. “The church is everywhere,” I thought to myself, “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Jesus Christ,” in war and in peace, in life and in death and in life beyond death. We are all in this together over the long haul.

It was during the parish announcements that we learned about their work in the refugee camps, two on the mainland and ten on the Greek islands, and how two women– Rebecca and Sharon– both aid workers and church members, were in the congregation that day. “What an opportunity!” I thought, and so we invited both to lunch. “Will you be my professors?” I asked, and what else could they do! It’s one of my best lines. Sharon works for Samaritan’s Purse out of Charlotte as an expert in refugee logistics, and Rebecca- a young Cambridge graduate in geography, is helping build a partnership with the Greeks. I now know two women on the ground in the camps, and we hope to send some money. I felt the Lord’s smile on me that Sunday in a special way. My heart was full and my eyes full of tears.

I need from time to time to feel connected to the larger church, and after visiting St. Peter’s in Rome and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and St. Paul’s in Athens, my little cup was overflowing. In my days away I have stood over the bones of St. Peter and St. Paul; I have stood in a church– now a mosque and museum- where the Nicene Creed was first confessed. After hearing Rebecca and Sharon’s first hand stories, I have a new perspective, and both of them reminded us over and over how important it was to have a local church, a circle of friends, and a pastor when doing such intense work. They told me of eleven Muslims who had recently come to faith in Jesus in one of the camps.

I am an American Methodist Christian, and a layer beyond that an English Protestant. And that is a good place from which to live out the riches of

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 7**

Christian faith since all of us have a perspective. But it is also a bit undernourished on the riches of tradition and art and sculpture and philosophy and the sense that God claims the whole of life and not just the narrowly religious part. And that is why it is good for my soul to acknowledge that in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches which lie beyond our borders there are many riches to explore, among them the continuing relevance of monasticism. Being around them helps me loosen the binding laces of my own biases and to breathe a richer air. Not everything is a how-to or all-about-me. It's about the mystery of the Triune God who showed his face to us in the laughter and agonies of Jesus and who is presently reaching into all cultures with hope.

It was on the walk to St. Paul's that we passed a small, thousand year old Orthodox Church sitting in the middle of a small square and surrounded by Fifth Avenue quality shops. Talk about a contrast! We could hear the chanting in Greek from outside. So full was the church that fifteen or twenty stood outside the doors. Now because it was July in Athens and the church not air-conditioned, a side door stood open for the ventilation of heat and the smoke of incense, and as we passed Lori stopped and said, "Look at that."

Behind the iconostasis, the wall of icons that blocks the people from the sanctuary, the robed priests were praying the communion prayers before coming out to serve the people, and they did not know we were viewing them. They were, and I mean this literally, lost in another world, the place where heaven and earth kiss each other. And while theirs is not our practice, they are celebrating a sixteen hundred year old liturgy, the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom of Constantinople just across the Aegean, that has not changed in all those years, and that deep sense of reverence and holy mystery has sustained them as Christians for seven times longer than we have been a country. What lasts does not have to be agreed with, but at a minimum it should be respected. Maybe there is something missing in our flip attitudes and lack of reverence. Maybe kneeling and crossing yourself in gestures foreign to us are ways to be reminded who it is we have an appointment with. Are there some things that ought not be casual? I did not say not joyful but not casual. I sometimes wonder if we have all but frittered away the capacity to be serious about much of anything, and God is a serious matter.

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 8**

It was sobering to visit Pompeii for a view of a once great city frozen in time and to realize just how prosperous and utterly immoral was the culture of every great city of the day, with perhaps Jerusalem as a minority report. And to have that confirmed at Corinth was to realize just how tough a world the gospel first came to. We may lament— and rightly so— the decline of morality in our day, but it is nothing like what existed in that day, except in certain sectors which we now mark with crimson lights. The right and wrong channeling of human passions is always an issue in every culture, and it either degrades and ennobles people in or outside the bonds of marriage. Church teaching may not be easy and therefore painful, but it is very good for people.

The visit to Corinth— an item on my bucket list— was especially rich for me. To see an inscription from the synagogue where Paul first preached, to stand on the grand avenue where he walked and discussed Christianity as a new philosophy, and to wonder where was the street of the leather workers where he first set up shop. And there I relearned what I already knew, that our common faith is not a myth or a legend, but an historical claim to things that happened, not good advice but good news of what the one God of the Jews had done for all the peoples of the earth through Jesus Christ now present with us in the Holy Spirit who is the life and truth giver.

“It started here,” I thought to myself, “and five thousand miles away in Greenwood, Pastor Phil has just taken six months to work through Paul’s first letter to the city whose ruins in which I now stand. And if it was this hard for him, and his culture highly resistant to the notion of one holy God of the Jews and the One he sent, then why do I think it will be easy for me?”

Every day as the sun passed its zenith, Paul worked in the shadow of the temple of Athena which stood on a small knoll at the corner of town. What do you say to a city that has everything and has no trouble adding one more deity, male or female, to the officially approved collection? You tell the story of Jesus, how he is a greater hero than all theirs put together, and how he fulfills their deepest longings, the same longings their myths portray but cannot deliver. He is alive from the dead and so immediately available. And some believed.

Such amazing engineering in their monuments and public works, and what

---



**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 9**

exactitude and beauty in their sculptures of the human frame! So fascinated with the image and yet so ignorant of the Maker. It is Jesus alone who restores the human being to their true destiny. That is the narrow, demanding truth of classic Christian faith. All that is properly human, all the abiding goodness and longing for beauty and love of one another and the wild wonder of the world is his, and in him alone it is healed. Apart from Jesus Christ life remains in pieces, unassembled. In him and with him we enter a new world in the midst of the old.

But it was not until Friday morning when we had left Istanbul and landed in Paris that the trip came together in a most unusual conversation. As we were about to board the long leg from Paris to Atlanta we found ourselves standing behind a woman who could just have stepped out of one of the display windows of Lamcombe or Chanel that formed the commercial backdrop of the gate area at DeGaulle. The body of a dancer, perfectly underdone makeup, great teeth, expensive hair cut, the look of a early middle aged cover girl. We later found out she was fifty-one. No surgery, just lots of years of expensive self care and exercise to push back time. The look of money and sophistication.

I don't remember how the conversation started, probably with us both recognizing each other as Americans in Paris. She named her city from the deep, old South. When I asked, "What brings you to Paris?" she said without looking up, "The Tango." And I thought, "Hey, this is interesting!" Because Lori was at my side I felt free to continue the discussion. And remember, I was out of uniform. Jeans, sport coat, loafers. Yes, I do have such for rare occasions.

Did you know that there's a Tango subculture around the world? I didn't, but then I also live in a specialized dance subculture: the Pawley's Island shag!

She continued, "I used to dance ballet, but I love the Tango."

"What makes you love it so?"

"Well, it's so dramatic. So careful and choreographed. Intimacy on the dance floor." I felt myself flush at her directness, but she was unembarrassed. "I go all over the world to Tango events. Ours is not an open marriage, but we have separate parts to our lives." Clue number one! She's probably not Baptist, and I hope not a Methodist! Maybe a lapsed Cajun Catholic.

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 10**

I probed further, “You’re married?”

“Yes, but all he does is practice law.”

“Well,” I asked naively, thinking back to my days at awkward teenage dances and the courage it took to ask a girl onto the floor, “How does it all begin if don’t know anyone?”

“In the Tango you just look across the floor until you lock eyes with someone. And when either of you gives the slightest signal— and she showed Lori and I several lifts of the eyebrow— you move to the center and begin the dance.”

I was starting to sweat a bit. “Should I tell her I’m a pastor before the conversation proceeds any further?” I decided against it. Lori was at my side, and hers was a world I’d never viewed before.

“Do you know about the Paris underground? The clubs?”

“No, I don’t,” I said.

“Well, I’ve always been curious, so I went. The owner of the Lido, a friend of mine, told me about them, but I would not go alone, so I hired a bodyguard as my escort. Five thousand dollars a night. Former French military. It was all very interesting, very sophisticated, very open.”

“There are companies that provide such protection?”

“Yes, she said. But not cheaply, and you have to know the right ones.”

I am not a prude, but I had about all I wanted. She was bumping into my boundaries, and she would no doubt have answered just about any question Lori or I dared ask. Beneath the slick packaging was a hungry heart, and we were safe to talk to, and is that not God’s grace as well? It was— I later recognized—the same conversation Paul might have had with one of the female sophisticates of Corinth long years ago. A woman with education and style and chic and money to come and go and do just as she pleased.

But one thing was missing. She was looking to the adrenaline and drama of endless romances to fill a hole in her heart, and her adventures were getting only darker and more dangerous. It was a downward spiral. She was a modern idolater, a worshiper of false deities, and may not have known it, or not cared if she did. She aspired to be a modern Athena or Aphrodite, a magnet for men,

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 11**

just like the temple in Corinth. She wanted them to worship her, to be their idol. Here was a woman who wanted to be a goddess, which is several levels beyond diva or even princess.

Her next trip— if memory serves me— is to Argentina, the high temple of Tango. The spirits of the old polytheistic world are making a comeback in our day. As I listened to several tour guides, you had the sense that Christianity and the moral code it's carried across the years was just too restrictive. What was needed was a new embrace of the old deities and their free ways. Remember that, for most people, when they stop believing in the one God they do not believe in no god but in many. Our real challenge is not atheism but polytheism, not no god but many shifting centers of loyalty and spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

I felt not drawn to her but sad, deeply saddened she was missing what Lori and I enjoy daily, which is a rich secure marriage centered around a common faith. We were on a fortieth wedding celebration, she moving from man to man on the dance floor as her husband padded his resume with another big case and fat settlement. She's married to a dunce, and it will not be long till she and he crash. Such a life cannot be sustained but at very high cost. No amount of money or toys or romances or learning or exploration of the forbidden can fill the hole in the heart God reserves for himself. She was a lost soul. A few more years of globetrotting, I suspect, and maybe a nip and tuck or two, but one night no one will lock eyes with her on a dance floor of strangers, and then what will she do? There was some evidence in the conversation that she was already drawing her twenty-four year old daughter into her exotic world away from home and I shivered at the thought of God's wrath on those who corrupt others, particularly their own children.

When I shifted to the discussion to our trips to Rome and Athens, she responded by trotting out her dual degree in classics, meaning Greek and Latin, and no doubt would have quoted the Greek of Socrates if I'd given her a chance. She was worldly, but she was no fake, and here I trust Lori's judgment.

When I later asked myself, "Why did she tell us all this?" the only answer

---

<sup>3</sup> A loose quote from G.K. Chesterton.

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. . . . . 12**

that came was, “We listened and showed interest,” and I wondered if in her world of dance and forbidden romance there was a Christian woman strategically placed in her life, and I prayed for her, though I never revealed my vocation, not out of my embarrassment but to avoid shaming her if there was any left, and I suspect there was. I went in the bathroom to make sure the word *Pastor* was not tattooed across my forehead. It wasn’t, but the grace of God was present, and I had the sense her story was not just a view of the old and ancient but also of the new paganism that has either never heard or else grown bored with Jesus and his church. And if she ever comes to Christ, either for the first time or after a long prodigal season, it will be through pain. To stare at the wrinkles and the sags in a mirror and wonder, “What happened to my life?”

After we parted— she to first class and us to the next section— Lori, who has a gift of spiritual radar— looked at me and said, “She’s a modern pagan, isn’t she? Just like what we’ve been learning about in our visit to the ancient world?”

“Yes,” I said, “I think you’ve got it.”

“It’s sad, isn’t it?”

“Yes it is,” I replied, “what do you think happened to her?”

“She’s gorgeous and smart, but there’s a hole in her heart she’s trying to fill with men and adventure. Something to do with her dad, probably, and the world of dancers.” She then went back to reading her newest chosen summer book, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims’ Progress*— I kid you not, where the women have names like Virtue and Chastity and Constance and Faith. Oh what a joy to have married a virtuous woman and to have such a life of faith and real adventure. Flying out just before the Turkish coup and flying into such conversations in the Paris airport with a lost coquette. Don’t tell me life with Jesus is boring because I’ve just got too much evidence to the contrary.

I love the church, the whole of the church across time. And, like my mentor Paul, I want to cultivate God’s field as a servant among other servants, to build it up along with other craftsman on the right foundation, because one day the fires of God’s purifying truth will pass through my life, and I want something of real worth to be left behind: gold and silver and precious stones, not just wood and hay and stubble.

So what is the church? We are the temple of the living God; we are the

---

**I Corinthians 3:5-17. .... 13**

place and the people where Jesus Christ may be encountered and through which he is seeking to build a cumulative case with everyone we meet. You don't always have to be the last link in the chain, just the next one, as Lori and I with Madame Tango from Baton Rouge. It was our job to listen and to pray. Someone closer to home will have to tell her the Jesus story and call her to become his newest follower.

It was good to go. Several items were checked of my bucket list. It's also good to return and resume duties. I will be sixty-three in just over a week, and how old that sounds. Truth be told, I'm still trying to figure out what to do when I grow up. Time is growing short, and there are so many good stories to tell. God is— after all— a storyteller, and all God's stories point in the direction of Jesus Christ, so let your life point there as well. I am a rich man, and I recommend to you the riches of a life lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of his people right here and across the ages. Love him, obey him, and then watch what happens. There is no shortage of meaning with our God.

