

A holy temple

By [Edwin Searcy](#)

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The [Christian Seasons Calendar](#) that hangs on my wall is open in this season after Epiphany to a painting by Kirsten Malcolm Berry titled "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). Fault lines are showing in First Church Corinth over which minister is to be credited with success and which one is to be labelled a failure. Paul keeps the focus on God. Once again the little church in Corinth pre-figures so many of our congregational stories.

Paul is searching for the best metaphor. Last Sunday he was preaching that the church is like a garden in which ministers are charged with cultivation but do not have the power to grow anything. That power is God's alone. This Sunday Paul pictures the church as a building in which pastors are builders working on someone else's building--one that belongs to Jesus Christ.

When Paul is writing there is no such thing as a church building. The metaphor of the church as a building is just that for Paul--a metaphor. For us the word "church" first means a physical building, as in, "Where is your church?" A sermon on this text may imagine a time when the word "church" will once again bring to mind not a place but the metaphor of a people worthy of the name "holy temple."

The NRSV includes this footnote: "In verses 16 and 17 the Greek word for you is plural." Perhaps the lector on Sunday will read the passage this way: "Do y'all know that y'all are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in y'all?"

In a culture marked by individualism we regularly hear the plural “you” of the Bible as a singular. But Paul is not saying that my body or your body is God’s dwelling place. He is saying that the church as a people is a holy temple where God’s Spirit takes up residence. Wow.