

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

Sermon Title: "Assembly Required"

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When Chris and I were first preparing to move here to Maine, there was one very important thing that we needed to do – and that was furnish an apartment! Yes, we were essentially in need of every household furnishing one would desire in a home and so we went to Ikea. Now, if you have never been to an Ikea – I believe the closest one to hear in down in Massachusetts, it is a magical land of reasonably priced furniture and household accessories especially perfect for the starter home. And so, this was our first stop as we shopped – and we found pieces that we truly cherish! We picked out what we wanted from the showroom, we headed to the warehouse, and soon, we had a U-Haul truck loaded with boxes – yes, boxes not furniture. You see, if you have never had the pleasure of going to Ikea, one of the main reasons I suspect that the furniture is kept at affordable prices is because assembly is required.

So, with a U-Haul truck full of boxes, we traveled to Maine, and then the fun began. Boxes opened, instructions in hand, we got to work. Putting together this furniture which, for the most part required no more tools than a simple screwdriver and perhaps an Allen wrench. Piece by piece, furniture started to appear out of these boxes. Some items were quick and simple, others took an hour or two to complete. Sometimes, I would step back and look at all the pieces and ask myself, how is this going to become a dresser? Well, the instructions eventually got me there. And with the exception of one mistake where I put a piece in backwards but was too far along in the assembly process to want to take it apart and start over so now it's just a quirky feature of the desk- except for that mistake, everything came together as it was pictured on the front of the instructions – as we had seen it in the showroom. And the true test came at the end. Did the drawers slide as they were supposed to? Or, if it was a piece of furniture on which you sat, did it hold my weight? And when everything worked as it was suppose too, I knew the building was complete.

As we reflect on our scripture reading for today from 1 Corinthians, I feel like Paul has just opened a box from Ikea for us and from it, we will assemble our life – we will assemble in our lives, a holy temple for God. Picture this with me if you will, many pieces scattered around the floor as Paul says, pieces of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw – I’ll expand these pieces to also include golden moment and precious memories, and then a foundation, already complete, already poured, already set for us to build upon. But there is one thing that is missing – the instructions. For as Paul reminds us, “each builder must choose with care how to build on the foundation”. There are no step-by-step instructions as we assemble our lives. There is no insert piece A into slot B or anything quite so specific. Yes, of course, we have the life of Jesus to model after - his teaching too guide us as we build. But the specifics are not there. For how you build your life guided by the teaching to love God and love neighbor, may look different than the person sitting nearest you, but that doesn’t make one right and one wrong for love can build into our lives in many different ways. How you show care and compassion in your life may look different than the care and compassion from another, but as long as it is built on the foundation of Jesus, there is much value in it. It may look different for us all, but we all are building.

Each day of our living we continue to assemble this life built upon the foundation of Christ. Some days, the building may feel quick and simple and other days much harder. We may have the right tools for the job or we may need to spend some time acquiring that which we need to continue to build a life of faith. From time to time, we may make mistakes and sometimes we may be able to deconstruct and fix the mistakes of our life and at other times we may accept those mistakes as quirky features in this life that we build. At the end of the day, we may look back on what has been added with admiration while also glancing down at the floor and realizing that tomorrow, we continue to build for pieces still remain.

This goes on and on, for as long as we live, we keep on building – we keep on assembling our lives into God’s holy temple. So when does it get tested? Well, unlike the Ikea furniture which was tested with weight and for functionality after every step was complete, the lives that we build are tested throughout. They are tested with the weight of life’s trials and for functionality of our life of Christian discipleship as we serve – does this life allow us to be Christ’s disciples. The love which is built into our lives is tested whenever someone enters our life in need of love. The care and compassion is tested when a need arises and our lives respond. The durability of what we are building is from time to time tested by the weight of the challenges that we face.

And, yes, what we build may not always withstand all the ways in which this life will test us. But, you know, the most beautiful part of this life that we build is that when our world does shake, when the life that we have built begins to crack, if what we have built around us does come crumbling down, the perfect foundation on which we stand always remains. And whether the life that we have built on that foundation needs minor repairs or a complete rebuild, the foundation will always be sure – it will not move, it will not give way – no matter how brutal the storms of life may get, the foundation of Jesus Christ remains always steadfast and always true.

Beloved in Christ, let the assembly continue. Amen.