

What is God's address?

1407 Venice. I still remember my address. I still remember what the house looked like when I was a kid. I decided to count all the places I've lived in my life. All the different addresses. Starting with the first residence in Virginia while my dad was in the Navy. Then the six different places in Colorado growing up. Then there were the four dorm rooms in Minnesota, the three apartments in Hyde Park while in seminary. While on internship, the small studio in Kansas City with the fold-down murphy bed. The stucco house in south Minneapolis I loved so much and how I cried and kissed the floor when I said goodbye to it. And then the 24 years on the Northside of Chicago, 5 addresses in Lakeview, and the one now in Edgewater. A total of 23 addresses. How can there be so many for such a young man, well, a middle-aged man?

What is God's address? It sounds like the title of a children's book. Seriously, where does God live? Whenever you don't know something, you google it. So I googled "sacred places." You get some lists of the most stunning sacred places around the world. I'd been to a few, recognized a few more, but there were so many on the various lists I had never heard of in Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal, Japan.

Imagine your simple life hundreds of years ago. You walk out of your everyday ho-hum existence into an otherworldly cathedral, the house of God it is called. Some people can't even walk into a church building today because of the ways they have been hurt by organized religion. Think of the never-ending Roman Catholic sex abuse scandals, or even the one at nearby Willow Creek.

I don't know if 1218 Addison is God's address, but we do have our share of rats, rabbits, and occasional roaches that take up residence here. Our building will be 100 years old in 2022. We are embarking on a capital campaign. Next month we will share the results of some behind the scenes work that has been going on. We don't own the building at Grace Place where HTLoop meets on Saturday evenings. It is a reminder that for Lutherans the church is defined as the place, the location, the community where the Word is proclaimed, and the sacraments celebrated.

What was God's address for the ancient Israelites? Starting with Moses, they had a portable shrine, a God-box-on-the-go, you could say. The ark of the covenant. How many of you saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark*? In the movie, the Nazis believed that if they acquired the lost ark, they would be invincible. Back to the Bible: the ark led the people through the desert. It was carried around the walls of Jericho. At one point Moses talked to the ark as if were God! And then, in today's reading, the ark is joyfully carried into the new temple. Solomon wins a lifetime achievement award for his temple, his great and grand building project.

Does God reside in the temple or not? Well, it's not a simple answer. On one hand, many psalms were written about the temple. Like psalm 84, one of my favorites that we just sang: "How dear to me," or "how lovely is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts. My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the Lord."

But the ancient Israelites, by the time of Solomon—like us—didn't believe that the ark or the temple was literally God's residence. All religions have shrines and holy places to remind us of God's presence amid life's setbacks and losses. Yet at the dedication of the temple, Solomon raises his arms in orans position (like we use at the Lord's Prayer) and gives this amazing disclaimer: Even the highest cannot contain you, O God, much less this most glorious, this sacred house for you I have built!

So what is God's address for Christians? Every answer is Jesus, right! And you are right! In John's gospel we hear about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Or as one paraphrase puts it: God moves into our neighborhood. God pitches a tent among us. For Christians, Jesus is the temple. Hold on, though. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, too, as Paul reminds us. OK, we've got it: God lives in us.

Which leads to today's gospel and the conclusion of a grueling and difficult lesson on consuming the flesh and blood of Christ. Most of the crowd leaves. It's just too weird. Jesus asks the twelve if they're ready to give up on the message as well. And Simon Peter speaks for them all. Where can we go, Lord? You have the words of eternal life. In other words, you are God's address for us. You show us the way. You are the place we meet God.

Of course, in our post-religious age, we build temples—skyscrapers—to commerce, industry and technology. We give our offerings, our earnings—our all, sometimes—at sacred malls or online shopping sites. If cathedrals used to dazzle and delight, what wows us today is the awesome, magical device in our hands with wonders beyond imaging. And even when we go to the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Canyon, or other places of natural beauty, after a few awe-struck moments and a few selfies, we rush into the gift shop to buy souvenirs or to post the event and look at other posts of cats and plates full of food at designer restaurants.

These days 75 percent of weddings do not take place in religious buildings. The new hot venues are barns, beaches, wineries, parks, hotel ballrooms. And why have a church or a pastor when a buddy can get ordained online. As Peter Marty writes, the church becomes an inconvenient stop on the way to the party. Yet sacred places are an important symbol of something more. The \$72 billion wedding industry has little interest in helping people prepare for the lifelong and spiritual task of marriage. There's no money in that.

Yes, Jesus is the dwelling place of God. Yes, you are God's address. Yes, God lives in all people and fills the earth with divine glory. Yet we also come to this house of God to remember again and again that all life is holy, all places are sacred, all people are created in the image of God. For God is here in water, bread and wine. God has moved not only into this corner of Addison and Magnolia, but to all our neighborhoods as well, with people of other faiths and no faith at all. For if God cannot be contained, maybe there is still hope for us and our world.