

# THE TRUTHS OUR BUILDING TELLS

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The church building on 1524 Summit Avenue was constructed in 1912 by an Episcopal congregation called St. Paul's on the Hill. Its architect was Emmanuel Masqueray, an immigrant from France who also was the architect of the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis and the Cathedral of Saint Paul.

Masqueray and the congregation reused stone from the church's original building in St. Paul's Lowertown neighborhood. It was "hailed up the hill" to be reset as the current structure. Whenever we touch these walls made of lovely Minnesota limestone, we share a connection to the Christians who came before us, who were saved by the same gospel as we are, who were united to the same Triune God.

This space is designed to be different from our homes or offices; it is neither a gym nor a theater (as many new churches are). As Masqueray nearly always did with the Protestant churches he designed, he built ours in the *Gothic* style (his Roman Catholic designs rarely were). The pointed arches over the transepts (to our right and left when facing the pulpit), the windows, the hand-carved cross beam, and the ceiling vaults, all demonstrate the Gothic style. For example, a pointed arch is constructed by the partial overlap of two circles, as though the two realms of God's lordship, heaven and earth, are overlapping uniquely here in the world.

The Gothic floor plan is in the form of a cross, called *cruciform*. When we gather with the saints every Sunday in our building, we are shaped into the form of the means by which we are saved: the cross of Jesus Christ, whose body we are.

A Gothic church has two main parts: the sanctuary and the nave.

The nave is where most of us sit. If we look up, we see wooden beams supporting the wooden ceiling — these are not accidental. *Nave* is the English version of the Latin *navis*, a word for "ship" or "boat" — which is what this is meant to be. In our lives, we are pilgrims on a



long journey, yearning for our true home across the sea, and we can rest easy no matter how dangerous the trip because our Captain is the One who rules over the wind and waves.

But the nave is not only an ark; but it's also a fishing boat. From this place we are to bring with us men and women who, like us, need shelter from the storms of this world.

The sanctuary is the space toward the front. Traditionally, this is where the "altar" was located. You can see the pink marble table, which is where the elements of the Lord's Supper were stored and presented. The sanctuary is designed to be a little piece of heaven come down to us on earth, since that event *actually* happened when God the Son took on flesh and tabernacled among us. Jesus is the mediator between God and man, so we proclaim his life and death and resurrection from the pulpit and from the ordinance of the Supper.

The most notable attraction of this building are the stained-glass windows. These are often seen by some Protestants as troublesome, for fear that they'll replace the Bible and its preaching!

But the purpose of these windows is brilliant. On Lord's Day morning, we sit in the building and see the one great light of the sun filtered through their pigments, telling us a bit of the story of God and his great deeds for us and for our salvation. The things of earth are truly given for our good, not only to enjoy but to see anew once the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ shines in our hearts, taking away our blindness. But the light of his glory also shines *through the things of the world and its history* because they all belong to and speak of the Triune God. From inside the church, from inside the gospel, the world is irradiated with the light of God who is light, and we see it more truly from inside than those do outside.

But these windows also serve that world outside. In the long darkness of our winters, in the evenings, this summit hill is lit with the glow of our windows from the inside out. The light from within the church — God, the gospel, we who are the "light of the world" — shines through these same windows telling a bit of the story of what God has given for the life of the world. They beckon people to come and see how the Light has shone and is shining in the darkness, and to know that the darkness has not and cannot overcome It.



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