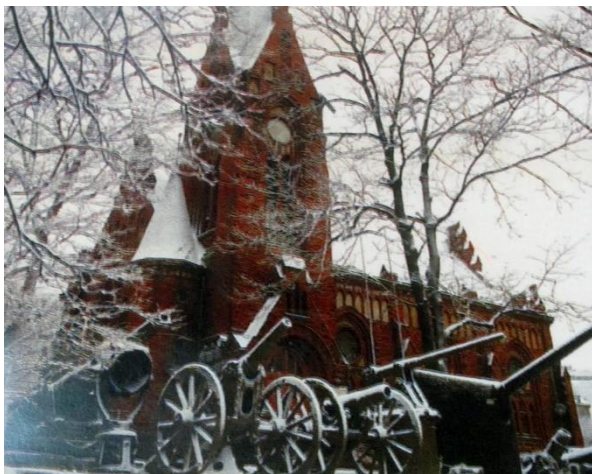


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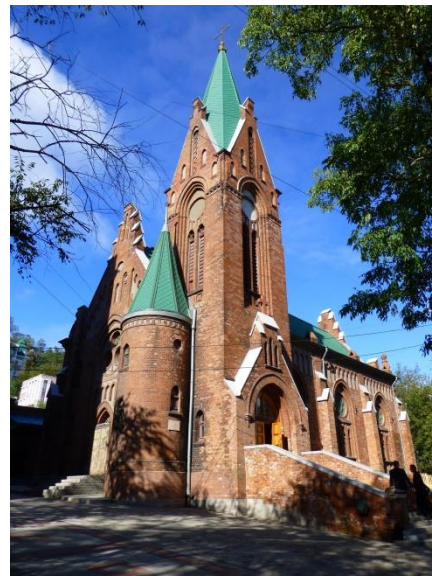
Epiphany Devotion

Rebecca Blocksome
Jim Cooper

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶ and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.’” (Mark 11:15-17)



St. Paul's pre-1992



St. Paul's post-1992

During the years of the Soviet regime in Russia (1920-1991), organized religion was outlawed, and places for religious worship were appropriated by the State and either demolished or repurposed for a variety of uses. In Vladivostok, St Paul's Lutheran Church was ultimately used for a museum housing artifacts of military campaigns in the Russian Far East.

In 1992, after the Soviet Union had collapsed, a group of Evangelical Lutheran Church worshippers who were descendants of the original congregants of St Paul's were able to obtain permission from the local government to return the church to its original purpose. As a condition, they agreed to move the military equipment to a new museum site. They were finally able to dedicate the church to celebrate the Glory of God once again.

All across Russia we witnessed instances of congregations once again raising churches for the worship of God: in Moscow, Krasnoyarsk, Khabarovsk, Ussuriysk, and Arsenyev. These congregations do so much with so little. We found instant acceptance, welcome, and fellowship with all of them. Our shared faith and liturgical tradition bind us despite our differences in culture, language, nationality, and the recurrent enmity of our respective governments.



In the video above, the choir of St Paul's performs a Russian hymn for the 20th anniversary of the church's rededication. Like Jesus clearing the money changers from the temple, these Russian congregations have reclaimed sacred spaces that were corrupted by secular power. As we celebrated the anniversary of the rebirth of St Paul's in Vladivostok, with representatives of Lutheran churches in Korea, Croatia, Germany, Finland, South Africa, the United States, and Russia, we could truly see, as it is written, that;

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations."

