



## 'Laying Foundations'

Lectionary 21 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
8:30 & 10:45 am, August 21, 2016  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton  
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[Isaiah 58:9b-14](#); [Psalm 103:1-8](#); [Luke 13:10-17](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

While going through a box of my old school mementos, I found a high school newspaper from my senior year. As the class of 1975 from Ridgway High School neared graduation, the paper published a description of the perfect Ridgway girl or guy. The nose of Dean, the athletic ability of Gina, the singing voice of Mary Jane, the hair of Paul, and so on. The final listing was pure superlative: "Most likely to succeed." That's where my name was listed. At that stage in my life no doubt I would have preferred "The smile of Nancy" or "The face of Nancy". But looking back on it now, I realize the superlative I received was a great compliment. (Footnote and disclaimer: I happened to be the editor of the Ridgway High School newspaper. However, I swear I did not write this article or influence the author in any way. Honest.)

The Camp Hill High School yearbook has often published a list of superlatives for its senior class. I recall that one of my kids was voted "Most likely to wreck the curve" and another of my children was voted "Best person to bring home to meet the parents." All these superlatives about what we are or what we might be are interesting and fun to contemplate.

You know, there are places in scripture where we learn who we are as God's people...or at least who we might well become in the shaping hands of the Potter, in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of Peter in the New Testament, for example, the writer says "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) I love that description of what God is doing in us.

And the Old Testament of the Bible has its moments, too, where the Israelites, the chosen people of God, are told just who God is creating them to be. We get that here, in the latter portion of the book of the prophet Isaiah. Let me set the scene for you. The year is somewhere around 538 BC, and the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, has granted the Israelites the right to return home to Jerusalem after their long forced exile at the hands of the Babylonians. But what they were returning home to was destruction. The Temple was destroyed. Buildings and homes razed. Farmlands long left untended and producing nothing. The people were in shambles, too. Those arriving home and those still residing there had no cohesion, no leadership to speak of. Everyone was out for

themselves so that those with any possible wealth or means of acquiring wealth cared little for those who had nothing. That's the picture of those early years following the Israelites' return home. No superlative here, except maybe "Most likely to fall into ruin..."

But in spite of what the people of God returned to, and what they acted and looked like in those early years following exile, God had a plan, and a new way for his people to be. The prophet Isaiah is his mouthpiece. First, God reminds his people to call on him, because he will be present with them. Listen to the half-verse that precedes the start of our reading today: "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am." (Isaiah 58:9a) And with the Lord God's promise of his faithful presence, Israel is encouraged to be faithful as well. Isaiah calls the people to treat their workers and slaves and servants fairly, to resist speaking with evil intent, to offer food to the hungry, to aid those who are suffering. In so doing, the people will be joining God in laying foundations where once all was in shambles. They will be laying foundations of justice and peace and generosity and faithfulness for generations to come.

**Then** Isaiah says to the people, "...you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." (Isaiah 58:12b). Do you hear that description of God's people? This is who they are and will be: They will be called "the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

To be someone who can see the brokenness of another, the needs of another, and then strive to build them up and set them on their feet again—let's just say if you do that, you are exactly the kind of someone whom anyone would want to bring home to meet their parents. To be someone who refuses to be judgmental, who will not pursue their own interests at the expense of others, and instead, honors God with a life of kindness and compassion modeled after Jesus—let's just say if you do that, you've totally "wrecked the curve." To be someone who courageously enters a conflict, seeking to resolve differences and end division—my friends, let's just say that is success. To be that kind of human being is what any follower of Jesus Christ ought to aspire. And it is precisely that way of living for which our Lord's Spirit gifts each of us uniquely.

I tell you, that's what I want us to be known as and described as—repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in. Laying a foundation through our loving and serving others that will last throughout our lifetime and then beyond, when our earthly lives are over, so that generations to follow will know the goodness of God in those foundations we have laid.

We restore streets to live in every day, as we interact with our neighbors, stock the local food bank, visit a nursing home, pray for healing in a friend's life, send money to far-off places where disaster has struck. We repair the breach every day, as we engage in civil civic duties, offer forgiveness to the one who has wronged us, and honestly admit our own wrongs and seek forgiveness. Our reading from Isaiah today reminds us that this is exactly what you and I have been created to be.

Of course, Isaiah was speaking both to individual people of God AND the whole nation of Israel. So, too, it is important we listen to this passage and see its clarion call not only to each of us as individuals, but also to Trinity, to the Body of Christ that together we are in this place. In these days to come, our members, even our newest confirmed young

people, are being asked to speak up about our future as Trinity. Through surveys and personal interviews, we have an opportunity to consider the foundations laid so faithfully here over many years by those who have gone before us, and, as well, to discern the foundations yet to be laid for the generations of those to come. Together we will discover the things we must do and actions we must take in order for our ministry to be a blessing to our neighbors near and far, and a sign of God's goodness in this community and our world. Trinity Lutheran Church is here for a purpose—for God's purpose—and just like Israel so long ago, as we seek to learn from God that purpose, we have the promise of his powerful presence. He will make us the people he has created us to be, so that we, as the author of I Peter wrote, "may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvelous light." **AMEN.**

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