



“Laying Foundations”

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 pm, Saturday, August 20, 2016
8:15 & 11:00 am, Sunday, August 21, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 58:9b-14; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

When my wife and I moved into a house outside of Bedford Hills, New York, across the street there was another house and then there was this area that was just undeveloped, it was pretty much woods and underbrush. After we had lived there for about a year, we had heard that the property had actually been sold and some big machines began to move in. The people that were out there that started to cut down the trees that were across the street and the machines came in and began move the undergrowth, before long, we saw the back hoes in there digging up the ground and making a basement. Now it took months for all of these things to happen. Pretty soon additional trucks came in and we saw that they were pouring a concrete foundation, putting in rebar. For literally months and months they prepared everything for this foundation. We were wondering when is this house going to actually be built. And then one day I went to work and when I came back, just ten hours later, the frame work had all been put up. I could see the house beginning to take shape. So for months all they worked on was just the foundation. And then the rest of the house didn't take that long at all.

Foundations are critically important to the building of any structure, for the creation of any household. Everything that is built up has to be placed on that foundation, and so you want to make sure that that foundation is absolutely perfect, because if there is some problem with the foundation, as you begin to build on the house above it, it makes mistakes even worse. I know that because I've done some home improvement. I know that even working in a room eight foot ceilings, if something is wrong at the bottom, by the time I get up to the top, that eight feet, it's going to be completely off. And imagine how much worse it is if you're going from the foundation to the top of the roof.

So getting everything perfect with the foundation makes life easier, it aligns all the pieces so that you can actually do the work that you need to do.

Now the cover of your bulletin is actually a picture of the foundation right here in this space. You can see that it must have taken months for them to get to the point of just preparing that work and getting the foundation to be absolutely perfect. On top of this foundation you might be interested in knowing, it was actually built with a steel framing, so these walls that you see that are brick actually have steel beams going all the way up. A couple weeks ago when Dan Reed and I took a contractor up to the top of the steeple, it

was interesting to note that that steel structure goes almost all the way to the very top of the steeple. You see if the foundation is strong then you can build on it and you can reach all the way to the sky. Now I don't know about you, but I love driving down 83 and when we go over the hill there and you look down and almost straight ahead there you can see Trinity's steeple. So you can look up and see in the distance that symbol of this congregation.

What if you can't look up? The gospel story is a story of a woman who is crippled. She is bent over; she has been bent over for eighteen years. Now you and I, we get to take for granite looking somebody eye to eye, we take for granite being able to look up into the stars and see the beauty of a moonlit sky. This woman has been looking at the dirt for eighteen years, unable to be able to look up and enjoy the creation that is all around her. For eighteen years she prayed that she would be delivered from such affliction, and then she meets Jesus. And Jesus heals her of affliction and she is able to praise God. Notice that's the first thing she does. The first thing she does is she lifts up her face and prays to God for what he has done through the person of Jesus Christ.

You look up in praise of God.

Now we have a big staff here at Trinity, everybody has a particular job that they are to take care of or an area of ministry that they are to minister to. These are the people that are involved in the details and the inter-workings of our congregation. They're supposed to be focused on youth and family ministry, or youth ministry, or the building and property, or the finances. But as the lead pastor, my job is not to get so much into the details; my job is to keep my head looking up. You see I am the one that's task to not just looking at what we're doing today, but what will we be about in five years, or ten years, or fifteen years? What are the different things that are happening in our world that this congregation needs to pay attention to, and therefore I need to pay attention to? It's all about laying foundations. Taking care of what has to happen on the ground, but also looking up and paying attention to what's happening in the world.

Isaiah gives a very beautiful picture of why this is important. Isaiah's speaking to the Israelites who have been taken into bondage and now they have returned home after fifty years in Babylon. He challenges them that if they do what is necessary they will be able to raise up the foundations of **many** generations. You see in my particular position that's what I am concerned about, a generational transformation that needs to happen with our congregation. Those are the reasons that we get involved in strategic vision and strategic planning, those are the reasons why we work on capital appeals, to pay attention to the foundation so that we can also look up.

St. Augustine once said, *"Do you wish to be great? Then begin by being. Do you desire to construct a vast holy fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundations."* And so those before us worked on this foundation and this structure so that we would be able to enjoy it and be able to praise God in it.

Isaiah uses some very interesting language here. When he's talking about "You" in these passages, he uses both singular and plural forms. So when he's talking about ancient ruins

being rebuild, “you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you should be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to live in.” He’s speaking not only of us as individuals, but also us collectively as the body of Christ. You see, the people only saw a land in ruins, their temple destroyed, their gates broken down, the walls in shambles. And yet Isaiah offers the people of Israel hope to go forward, a renewal of the very hand of God. God would renew their land, renew their structures, but also God would renew the hearts of the people.

It’s not just about brick and mortar; it’s also about the very transformation of our lives as the body of Christ. The word in Hebrew that Isaiah uses is *Nephesh*; it means literally “one’s whole being.” You and I are to give our whole being to God and to God’s purposes. And when we do that the breaches shall be repaired, the streets will be restored, as we saw our kids doing in Detroit. The hungry will be fed; we will be able to treat each other with respect and love. Hand-in-hand with God and with each other.

So brothers and sisters, what will you do to lay a foundation for yourself and for your family and for our congregation? You and I have been blessed in so many ways with resources and gifts and energy and abilities.

A colleague in New York wrote a letter, an article for a newsletter in the monastery that I often go to and he talks about the power of prayer in his life. And in that he speaks about where does our power come from. Now if you listen to a lot of people today, self-help gurus and such, they’ll talk about how you need to well up that power from within you, you got to get your head right so that you can get into it. But as Jonathan wrote about – “*the power of prayer is that it doesn’t come from within us, it comes external to us by God.*” The Latin there is *extra nos*. It comes from outside of ourselves, God working his Holy Spirit in us. And certainly the Jewish people who understood that as well. They understood that it was God who gives them the Sabbath, a holy day, set apart, as a gift for them! As a gift for them to be able to lay the foundations that they need in their life. That day of Sabbath was to be one of rest so that you can recharge your batteries and get strength for life and ministry, because we all know that if given to our own selves and God knows human beings even more than we know ourselves, that we will probably just work ourselves to the very death. So God demands a day of rest from that hard world. But that day, that Sabbath day is also one of renewal, which unites us as a community of Christ as we make a commitment to God in worship, in learning. Make a commitment as a faith community to each other as we care for one another and love one another. But the day of Sabbath is also one of remembrance, of recognizing that God comes to us in external means, through the proclamation of his word, through the giving of the means of grace and baptism and Holy Communion. When we gather around the font for confession and absolution, when we talk to one another in the gathering space and have mutual conversation and consolation, when we join together in Christian community we honor that Sabbath.

And so brothers and sisters we invite you to lay the foundation of your life with a commitment of Sabbath living, rest, renewal, and remembrance of the God who strengthens us in mission and ministry in his name.

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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