

First Presbyterian Church Advent Series: Close to Home
Luke 1:57-80, “Laying the Foundation”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 12/5/2021

This Advent we are talking about coming home.

Last week we explored the feeling of being homesick and how the arrival of Jesus invites us to walk toward the heavenly home we long for.

This week we turn to the metaphor of foundation.

If we are finding God close to home,
what’s underneath that? What gives us confidence and security
at the bottom of this home we have with God?

Foundations are important. Every morning for weeks I have woken up
to the sound of pounding machines as workers drive in massive posts
that will be the foundation for the renovated Organic Valley Creamery
along Hwy 99.

I think about how much time it’s taking to drive in all those things,
and how deep they have to go, and how much weight they will have
to support, and it impresses upon me that foundations
are really important.

Here’s a photo of a foundation for a church being built by Mission Inter-Senegal.
Our church’s mission team has given \$6,500 to build a foundation
just like this one for a new church plant that is being led
by Senegalese Pastor Adama Etienne.

PICTURE

Adama has become a friend of Doug and Chris Larson as they have
travelled down to Senegal a number of times to participate
in the ministry Adama is coordinating.

But foundations, of course, come in more forms than just physical ones.
We also have a spiritual foundation for our individual lives
and a shared foundation as the body of Christ.

This week, as we move deeper into the Advent Season,
let us consider the foundation we are laying when we welcome
the Christ child into our world, when we shift the weight of our faith
from our own accomplishments to the promises of God.

Zechariah's canticle in Luke 1 comes with the conviction that God
will bring us home, God will see the plan of salvation through to completion.

Why was Zechariah so sure about this foundation?

Because at first he doubted it, of course!

Doubt precedes belief. So we shouldn't stomp on doubt,
but rather let it do the work of driving us deeper into the questions
about who God is and what God is doing.

Zechariah had been mute and deaf for months
because he doubted the angel Gabriel
who told him he and his wife would have a son
and name him John.

After these months of communicating through sign language,
Zechariah finally gets on board with God's mission
and affirms that his son who is eight days old
will be named John.

When he indicates this, his tongue is released, he can speak again,
and he is filled with the Holy Spirit to prophesy
by singing this song about what God is doing.

Now keep in mind that no Spirit filled prophet
had been in Israel for 400 years. That's a dry spell.
If we're talking about foundations, there's not much left here
of a prophetic foundation for sharing the message of the Lord.

So Zechariah's doubt led to his being tongue tied,
which laid a foundation in him to proclaim something deeply true
which nobody expected.

His wife Elizabeth does have the son, and as they are about to name him
after Zechariah, Elizabeth says, "No! He is to be called John."

How she was let in on this is a mystery.

So they consulted Zechariah he wrote down on the tablet,
"His name is John."

Zechariah's tongue was loosed, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit.
And so it came to pass that in this most desperate of situations,
in this time when nothing is going right,

Zechariah says:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation
for us in the house of his servant David."

Presbyterian Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri writes that,

"Having lost his voice for his initial disbelief, Zechariah regains it just in time to praise God for God's mercy and to pronounce a blessing, a prophecy, to his son that would set the tone for John's life and ministry. While the neighbors and relatives gossiped about the miraculous circumstances of John's birth—circumstances that amazed as much as frightened them—they also worried, wondering, "What then will this child become?" (v. 66). Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit and knowing his son would become the "prophet of the Most High," (v. 76) spoke words of vision to a newborn that grew strong in spirit and helped lay the foundation into the way of peace."

Zechariah's son John is only 8 days old and

Jesus is still inside of Mary's womb when he says not
"This is a sign that God will do something," but,
"God has already done something."

Zechariah speaks about the future of God's salvation
as though it were a presently accomplished reality. That is deep faith.

Our spiritual foundation is Jesus who dwells within us through the Holy Spirit.

That sounds good enough, but what does that mean?

Practically, how do we experience that in real life?

Knowing what God has accomplished through Christ,
we build our lives upon the foundation in ways that keep us
in contact with it.

Faith that lasts has many contact points with its foundation not just one or two.

What are the words, blessings, and actions that have
laid the foundation for your life?

A job you didn't want but learned a lot from?

A circumstance in which you were forced to trust God in new ways?

Stories passed down from your grandparents?

What scriptures have found their way into your heart
so that you can draw upon them when needed?

Who helped lay a foundation of faith for you?

A coach, a teacher or mentor?

A friend you never expected?

An encounter with God in the created world?

The foundational love of Jesus can arrive in our lives in so many ways.

We might also ask: How are you assisting others connect with our foundation?

In truth, we aren't all building individual houses on individual Jesus
foundations, but rather we are altogether a massive spiritual house
made of living stones built upon the cornerstone of Christ
as you can read about in 1 Peter 2.

This Advent we must remember that we stand on the foundation
of God's in-breaking Kingdom that has been established
through the arrival of Christ and the sure promises of God,
and we contribute to the foundation of faith
for the spiritual homes of those who will come after us.

Thinking of them, thinking of children, here's a poem about a child's foundation.

Words for the Beginning a Poem by Sarah (Are) Speed

If I could give you words for the very beginning—
for the stretches and the yawns,
and the opening of eyes,
for the first hiccups,
and the first smiles,
and the first purse of your lips,
I would say, "Oh, dear child, how you are loved."

But the thing about love is you can't stop there,
so I would go on to say,
"You are strong, stronger than you think.
And you are not alone—look at these parents
 who adore you
and these doctors and
 nurses fighting for you.
And you are enough,
 already enough.
You haven't done anything yet.
You've just been here,
breathing,
sleeping,
and already, you are enough.
And then I might say,
"This world is a mess,
but it is your home,
and you can make it better,
so always try to make it better.

And maybe most important
 of all:
there is a love
that is bigger than
 my understanding,
that moves through
 this world,

and I call that love God.
And that love is here,
here in this room,
and that love knows
your name by heart.”

Those are the words
I would say to you
as you stretch and yawn
and open your eyes
on the very first morning
of your very first day.
Let that be your foundation,
like Zechariah did for John.
Let love be your beginning.