

“What’s Underneath”
Ezekiel 33:1-7; Luke 14:27-33
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, October 20, 2019

Both of the scripture readings this morning are about building.

Most people like to build things.

All the way back to Noah’s Ark and the Tower of Babel we have been builders.

Sometimes for good, and sometimes out of greed.

We are creative and ingenious and most of us like a project.

And lots of times building becomes a metaphor for spiritual things.

We understand building but we don’t really understand spiritual things.

So we compare them - - to help us understand.

And there is lots to learn about life - - from building.

One thing about buildings is they have foundations.

There is usually a big hole in the ground that comes first.

We clear the ground, and lay the foundation.

But most of the time - - when we look at buildings - - we don’t think about foundations. / They are out of sight - - and underground. / Out of sight and out of mind. / New buildings make news - - but usually it’s not the foundation that is at the center of the news story. / Unless there is something WRONG with the foundation.

If there are cracks in the foundation - - then it makes news.

If there is a problem.

Otherwise we usually focus on what’s above ground.

The beautiful architecture, and so forth.

So in order to get good buildings, you have to plan ahead.

Think about how much lead time we have had on our new Habitat for Humanity house. / We are just about to pour a foundation - - and we have been working on this for months. / But hopefully the planning will help things go smoothly.

Maybe a bit better than the Cornelius Pass renovation.

Did anyone actually think the Cornelius Pass would reopen on time?

In my experience - - lots of time - - building projects - - have unexpected glitches - - and we don't always finish what we start - - at least not on time.

So maybe there is something to learn from Cornelius Pass: a caution.

Well - - in this morning's Gospel reading from Luke - - a building stands half finished - - with its foundation exposed. / The builder got the foundation in - - but was not able to finish the building.

Imagine a building half finished - - its foundation exposed - - walls incomplete.

And then standing next to the building is the contractor.

He has run out of materials and funds - - and people criticize him.

That's the picture Jesus paints for us.

And it's not a pretty picture - - if you imagine yourself as the contractor!

But then Jesus says - - there is something to learn from this about - - being a disciple. / It's a negative example. / Don't make this contractor's mistake - - learn from it instead.

Instead - - in order to - - be a disciple - - go ALL IN!

The problem the contractor had - - was - - he was not all in.

He was only **partly** ready - - and he didn't get **anything** out of it.

Of course when we hear this we can't imagine ourselves being so foolish.

Of course WE would prepare - - and we would finish. / Right?

So - - is Jesus - - saying something fairly simple...advice to plan ahead?

Maybe that's part of it.

But I don't think the point of the story in Luke is that simple.

I think the point is about the cost.

My first hint of this is that I kind of like this contractor.

Sure he's a little foolish.

But at least he built a good foundation.

It doesn't say he did a shoddy job.

Maybe he put everything he had into the foundation

...and THAT'S why he ran out of money!

So NOW I expect him to go out and raise MORE money. / He won't stay stuck.

Not this guy - - he's someone who goes off in a frenzy - - and goes for it.

Right?

I mean - - Jesus did NOT say - - DON'T build the building.

Jesus just said - - remember to do what...? "count the COST"

Look at verse 33 - - whoever does not go all in - - cannot be my disciple.

Jesus does NOT say - - don't be my disciple.

Jesus does NOT say - - you can't be my disciple.

Jesus just says - - prepare - - and trust - - and go ALL in.

Surely the point is "go all in" - - rather than "don't go for it".

And don't you think that's what Jesus is getting at?

Jesus wouldn't want us to say, "well we counted the cost and out of prudence and good judgment we've decided it's too much - - and so we've decided to say, "no thanks" we think it's best if we don't become disciples. / But thanks for the offer.

Doesn't Paul advise us to be "fools for Christ"

So Jesus is just saying - - don't be a fool - - in worldly terms.

When you count the cost - - you realize - - this is a whole life thing.

But that's not a reason NOT to do it.

I'm pretty sure that "don't bother" was not Jesus's point here.

It's like Jesus was saying - - I'm looking for a few good disciples.

And we say - - oh me - - me - - pick me.

I've got what it takes.

Or - - maybe we think - - ok I could use some work there.

I better get to it - get better - and work on my spiritual foundation.

Remember the story from Luke - - if you are only PARTLY ready - - you get NOTHING out of it. / It's not that if you go part way - - you get a partial return. That's NOT how it works in this case. / If you go PART way - - the project stalls.

A solid foundation - - is the beginning - - of a bigger project.

So take a minute to think about your spiritual foundation.

Is it solid?

What about your family foundation? / Your friendships?

When everything gives way - - will your foundation hold up?

And what about other people? / Sometimes we don't know what's below the surface - - in the lives of those around us.

I remember a rather unkempt - - seemingly poor - - socially clumsy man who came to church one day. / He made people a bit nervous. / But we had studied the Good Samaritan parable - - about loving strangers - - and helping those in need - - and all of a sudden - - there he was.

During the time for sharing joys and concerns - - he stood bolt upright.

He was not shy.

He just asked that we recite the 23rd psalm for him.

He hadn't heard it in a long time.

And so we did.

What's below the surface - - in you? / In me?

Have you ever had the experience of - - discovering what's below the surface in someone else? / Meeting - - and talking - - and discovering connections...

Just when - - on the surface - - you feel all alone - - there someone is.

Ezekiel - - on the Old Testament - - has this image of someone in a watch tower.

The point is - - watch out for each other.

We are here - - to watch out for one another.

We don't always know how they will respond.

But what is important is - - to watch.

I believe - - that is how we build a strong foundation of faith.

Taking responsibility for each other - - and for our faith - - and our families - - and our church - - and our world - - is the way.

It is not a foundation that is built easily.

And it does cost - - something of us.

But - - a strong foundation - - is the kind of foundation that will last.

It will survive the storms.

And it is what Christ calls us to.

Because - - there is a WHOLE building to build!

A foundation is not an end in itself.

It is the beginning of something.

So what are YOU preparing for - - in terms of your faith?

When I listen to people talk about Plymouth Church - - the thing that they say is important to them - - is that way we take care. / Nancy talked about it in her remarks on stewardship.

Let's continue what we have started here!

Let's prepare for a bold future!

How can we be stewards of what God has given us?

The word stewardship - - originally came from the word "steward".

A steward - - was the one who made sure things inside the house went well.

Stewards made sure everyone was fed - - and the household was managed well.

Stewards on ships - - make sure everyone on board is - - ok.

To be a steward in God's Kingdom - - we help take responsibility for one another.

Biblically speaking - - we are all given the job of being stewards of the world.

God's creation - - is ours to care for.

So it is a gift - - not a possession.

As it says in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it".

Everything is Gods.

Imagine the world as a ship.

There are lots of people on board.

It is a beautiful ship.

And YOU are a steward.

This world is ours to take care of.

This church is here for us to take care of.

And God has gone ALL IN with US - - by making us stewards of it all!

The only question is - - how will we respond?