

8/23/26 St. Paul's, MV

Proper 16A
 Exodus 1:8- 2:10
 Psalm 124
 Romans 12: 1-8
 Matthew 16: 13-20

I've got a few cracks in the foundation of my house, and that worries me. Foundations are important. . . they hold up all the things we value, so a weakness in a foundation should be looked after. I, who admittedly know next to nothing about such things, am trying to diagnose the problem by my assessment that the ground that supports said foundation is not sound. Admittedly, I don't know if what I'm looking at is what I think I'm looking at, but I do know that foundations are important because of what they hold up, and so I am doing my best to shore up my foundation.

I read, some time ago, of a man touring the Wexner Art Center at The Ohio State University. As he toured this modern building, he noted a few things. "it is (he wrote) a fascinating building designed in the post-modernist view of reality. The building has no pattern; Staircases go nowhere. Pillars support nothing. The architect designed the building to reflect life. It went nowhere and was mindless and senseless." And this man, appreciating art, but with pertinent questions as he toured the art center, asked the tour guide, "Did they do the same thing with the foundation?" and the answer came with a laugh, "You can't do that with a foundation!"

Foundations, whether real physical foundations, as in our buildings or homes...or foundations of other things (like our belief systems) are essential, because they support the fundamental elements like houses. . . *or core beliefs.*

Jesus asked those early disciples two questions: Who do *people* say that I am? AND - WHO DO *YOU* say that I am?? Jesus, as a teacher, was getting down to see if his students had

grasped the core points of his ministry, his teaching.... that is, do you know who I am and what I have come to teach you? How will your lives be different/how will your treatment of other people (your actions in the world) be different in that learning?

And Peter, who often missed the point, was awake and alert this time and had a pretty good answer, “You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God...” (Matthew 16: 16) And from that, Jesus rewarded Peter, making him “The Rock,” really a pretty strong foundation for what was to come. Peter understood this one...that Jesus is God’s Son – the long-awaited Messiah, who would save the people from pain and suffering; and that he came to show us the very nature of God . . . good foundational beliefs for us as individuals, and for the church that would follow.

If we look at this as foundational material upon which the church would come to be built (and things like apostolic succession and pages upon pages of doctrine written through the ages) I wonder further: How did Peter come to have this A+ answer? Did he, for instance, sign up for an inquirers’ class? Probably not...Peter, like all of us, knew this basic information about Jesus because of his encounters with him. And what about us? What do we, both as individuals, and members of this institution we call church? what do we know about Jesus? Who do we say he was and is? It depends on who you ask. Through various lenses, some would say: the Son of God and the Messiah in faith, or a foundational religious teacher, or a key historical figure who shaped world history. Our experiences shape our beliefs and so we are formed by our encounters with family and friends with worship and learning at church. . . with our experiences in life.

Somewhere near you in the book shelf in front of you somewhere is a BCP. Find one and open it to p. 844. // If you were raised as an Episcopalian – or Anglican - you might remember *The Catechism*. You may remember it from Confirmation Class, or other study groups. Indeed, what we find in the Catechism is an outline of the church’s teaching. It is, I suppose. the basic

understandings of our Episcopal Church, especially regarding the person of Jesus and of the church that followed him. (Though he *probably did not intend to start something called a church, because, after all, he was a Jewish man trying to reform Judaism...but that's another sermon.*) So, foundational beliefs for us as Episcopalians....Flip to p. 849 (and you can go back and read what we skipped when you can/when you have time...or when you want to take a nap...) Starting on the bottom of the page, are core beliefs about Jesus. First question “What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the only Son of God? A: ”We mean that Jesus is the only perfect image of the Father and shows us the nature of God...” Q # 2 – What is the nature of God revealed in Jesus? A: – ***God is love.*** For me, that sums it up well. There is more to read...but, as I said, if you were raised as I was, ***you probably were somewhat influenced by the words in our BCP.*** . . whether in the prayers or the messages during worship, or the books you have read. All may have formed your foundational beliefs about who Jesus is/was. But foundational beliefs are formed in other ways.

The basic foundational elements of our beliefs are built ***on our experiences*** of Jesus in our lives. You may remember that three-legged stool, the image of the ways we are formed as Christians: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. But there's a fourth leg often considered, which, to my way of thinking, makes the stool sturdier – that of *experience*. ***Who do you say Jesus is in terms of your own experience? What have you experienced of Jesus that has helped you form your answer to the question, “WHO DO YOU SAY THAT Jesus IS?”***

Experiences help form foundations....and foundations...like mine under my house, or in my beliefs, are core...*because of what is built on them. My house, full of memories and love, wouldn't stand without that foundation. My beliefs wouldn't stand without some foundational*

understanding. Often the part we don't see is what holds up the part we do see....and often that part relies on the skill of the builder, and the relative strength of the soil or material underneath.

A few years ago, I visited my friend, Anne, who happens to own and run a Christmas-tree farm (like Sandy and Alec do.) As we strolled around her acreage among trees of varying sizes, and varieties, our discussion turned to a more scientific understanding of the miracle of plants. Anne watches over thousands of little trees, each one grounded in the earth, watered by nature...(or by Anne in the hot months) Each tree, we believe, is an individual being....each tree fighting for water and nutrients and the right to grow and to thrive....*as the forest industry hopes it will.* But there is more.

There is now a substantial body of scientific evidence that refutes the idea of rugged individualism; of survival of the fittest – in regard to trees. This body of information shows instead that trees of the same species are communal and will often form alliances with trees of other species. Forest trees have evolved to live in cooperative, interdependent relationships, maintained by communication and supported by a collective intelligence (like an insect colony.) These soaring columns of living wood often draw our eyes upward to their outspreading crowns, but the real action is taking place underground...inches beneath our feet. German Author, Activist, and Forestry scientist Peter Wohlleben has written a book (*The Hidden Life of Trees*) about the trees of old growth forests and what scientists like him are finding out. “Some are calling it the ‘wood-wide web’ “writes the author. In a nutshell, science is discovering that in most every forest that is not too damaged, trees are connected to each other through underground fungal networks. Trees share water and nutrients through the networks and also use them to communicate. They send distress signals about drought and disease, for example, or insect attacks, and other trees alter their behavior when they receive these messages. I find this

fascinating....and foundational. The author's purpose in penning the book is to cause change – to make it more likely that these old-growth forests are saved.

This author wrote to influence his readers....to, I suppose, cause change... or make permanent and positive changes in God's creation. All of what Jesus taught, and what we have come to know about him, form *our ways* in the world, and cause us to be and do as he taught. When Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" the next question may well have been, ". ***and what are you going to do about it?***" What difference will our foundational knowledge of Jesus make in the world around us?

We are formed by the love of God, the presence of God's Holy Spirit, and by the creation around us. Jesus came among us to show us a better way of living. May we know and be that way.