

First Mennonite Church Edmonton

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I have had the fortune, or misfortune, of learning first hand how important a solid foundation is this past week. Shortly after returning home I received an email from my landlord indicating that the condo complex was going to be doing driveway repairs, and mine was on the list. Once the work had begun, I had a chance to speak with the contractor and the story was this: because the ground underneath the driveway wasn't properly prepared, and because the rebar wasn't properly installed, and because the concrete has poured in haste, water had gotten in and the ground beneath the driveway began to slump away. And because the foundations of the driveway were poor, the driveway was cracking and slumping down.

The consequences of this was a day of jackhammering and clearing away rubble, a day of drilling and preparing, properly this time, the ground and rebar underneath the driveway, and a morning of pouring new concrete, and I'm sure a couple thousand dollars later. So now, I have a new driveway is curing, with hopefully a better foundation underneath it. This driveway repair is an apt metaphor to parallel our parable today. To put it simply, without a good foundation anything you build is bound to fall apart sooner rather than later.

This parable is bundled into a section of scripture with a bunch of other sayings of Jesus. Our parable is a part of Luke's version of Jesus' sermon on the mount, and is often called the Sermon on the Level Place, or Plain. In the Sermon on the Plain you have the Luke's equivalent to the Beatitudes in Luke's Blessings and Woes, and amongst other sayings and messages our parable, or saying, ends the Sermon. It's kind of like the period at the end of the sentence, the final parting thought, or the conclusion.

I don't think I need to emphasize or over emphasize the importance of a strong and solid foundation. Whether it's with a sandcastle, or anything else in our lives, we know that it's important to start things off correctly. I'm sure that when building the church on 91st St. the foundation was carefully prepared, so that the building would serve the congregation for many years. But to focus literally on physical foundations, I think, is playing into the parable a little too much.

Much of what Jesus is talking about here is more than the foundation of a structure, or even a belief system. Jesus, I think, is talking about the foundations of our actions. Jesus is likening his teaching to a solid foundation on which to build. But if his teachings are just heard and not acted upon, they're just noise. I think he's trying to draw an intimate connection to where our actions come from.

With the crowds that were gathering, there were likely some who were eavesdropping, trying to see what all the fuss was about. There were likely those who heard Jesus' teachings, and did nothing with it, and then there were those who listened, absorbed and tried their best to live out Jesus' teachings. And what he is saying in this parable, is that simply hearing him isn't

sufficient, eavesdropping, listening in, is not enough. Jesus suggests that action needs to come out of those lessons. And it does, but the question that interests me today is what are those foundations for us?

I alluded to this in my Friday letter, asking the question, what are the foundations that inform our faith, how we live, what we believe, how we be the church together? It's a bit like asking the church what your vision statement, our foundations are what grounds us, it's our touchstone, the thing that we can come back to. To play on Jesus' parable a little bit, our foundations are those things that hold in the midst of the storms of life. Our foundations are also the things that shape our action, they shape our 'doing'. They are the 'being' behind the doing. What we believe, what we have set as our touchstone, informs how we live and what we do.

And so what are they? That is a tougher question, it's also a very personal question. This is the part where I admit that I don't know you as well as you know yourselves. I can make some educated guesses, I can make some assessments based on how I've come to know you. What I can suggest is this:

We are a congregation that values inclusivity be it age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc. Including everyone is important. I would say it's foundational to the congregation. And because of that value, you have begun to take actions that live that out. Whether it's a statement of inclusivity, whether it's making space in our weekly worship for children, youth, seniors and anyone else to participate. That, I would say, is one of our foundational values.

We are a congregation that values peace, wholeness and justice. This is why we work with settling refugees, why we work with organizations such as EMCN, and MCC. I would also then suggest it's because we resonate with Jesus' story of being a refugee himself, or that we see this as a way of living into God's kingdom values of love for the neighbour, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, and the imprisoned.

We are also a congregation that values its history. The story of how it came to be. And not just how it assembled in the last 60 odd years, but the heritage that we carry too. A heritage that is linked back not just to the early anabaptists, but also to the teachings and leadings of Jesus.

We are a congregation that values each person's voice. This was evident in my candidating weekend, it's evident at our congregational meetings, and as I've listened to stories, it was evident in the way that the congregation was founded, as a discussion group.

And there are likely many more foundations that have shaped us and guide us as a gathered people of God.

And then there are our personal foundations. The ones that shape us. Some of these we 'formed' by our parents growing up, and they are strong, others are maybe starting to show their age ready for a renovation. Some of our foundations we've recently built, whether it's new insights, new awarenesses, new experiences, new ways of choosing to live. And others maybe

need to be replaced. But it's these foundations, regardless of their character, regardless of their condition, which shape us and our actions.

Now I can't tell each of you what your foundations are, that's for you to share but I can speak for myself. For me, it's my faith in God, that God is near and journeying with is at the base, my experience of chaplaincy training in Toronto has shaped my foundation in such a way that I have a difficult time not seeing others as children of God. My experience of prison vision with Person2Person has shaped how I look at Canada's justice system. Travel has expanded my identity. And living and working across the country has helped me understand myself as a citizen of Canada, not of any one province. And now that I'm preparing for marriage I'm finding out how much of my foundation has space for my spouse to dwell with me.

And this is all that's going on inside of me. And all of this shapes how I live, how I act. So how about you? I would invite you this week, as we get ready to start up into the fall to reflect a bit on the foundations in your own life, in your own faith journey.

Spending time with this parable, has made me wish this parable would have come at the beginning rather than at the end of our parables series, if only because it sets up what I'm hoping we can continue to learn and live into, which is that we must attend to our foundations because it's those foundations which inform everything else. Our foundations are where our 'being' comes from, and it's from that 'being' that our 'doing' is informed. And as I hope we'll see over the course of this fall worship series, it's the Apostle Paul's foundation which is shown in his letters to the various churches that he planted. And we might even see how some of these foundational teachings still, and continue to shape us today.

Amen.