

**Sermon - A Strong Foundation**  
**The United Churches of Olympia**  
**December 5, 2021**

John 1:57-80

First time I learned about the importance of foundations was when I went on a two-week project to Germany with my college. Our project was to lay the foundation for a church that was being built in Ingelheim on the Rhein River. We dug the trench in the shape and specifications of the blueprint we bent rebar and created cages that fit in the trenches that would reinforce the concrete. And on our last day we watched the concrete truck come in filling the space with wet chunky concrete. I would watch as all the concrete would ooze into all the crevices and around all the rebar. We watched as it was smoothed on the top before it began to set. And then we were done. The concrete would dry and cure and become the foundation for a church that I've never seen but I know exists, standing on that spot providing sanctuary for this community that I hope is still thriving and is as generous and welcoming as they were when I was there all those years ago.

Today, we have the story of Zechariah. The book of Luke begins with the acknowledgement, once again, that the birth narratives of Jesus takes place to and among oppressed and occupied folk, in the days of King Herod. Zechariah was a priest and is married to Elizabeth. Like many forefathers and foremothers, they had grown old without having a child. Like Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, and Hannah, Elizabeth had been unable to give birth. An Angel comes to Zachariah and tells them that they will have a son. Zachariah of course has his doubts and says to the Angel how will I know that this is true? And the Angel replies I'm standing right in front of you! I am from God sent to speak to you but because you don't believe me I will make it so that you are unable to speak until the day your child is born.

Somehow Zechariah managed to finish his work today and goes home. There is a lot left out of this story. But we are told next that indeed Elizabeth does become pregnant. When Elizabeth is six months pregnant Luke tells us that the angel now goes to Mary and invites her into this holiest of stories – to be the mother of Jesus. We read in Matthew where the Angel comes to Joseph and tells him to keep Mary and a father to Jesus. Busy angel.

Our reading picks up with the birth of John the Baptist and everybody is perplexed that they are not naming the child after Zechariah. Elizabeth says his name is John. The community looks to Zechariah and he writes on a tablet, his name is John and in that moment scripture says Zechariah is now able to speak again and begins praising God and it is through this testimony that word begins to spread- that surely God's hand is upon John.

Noticing something special happening around them, the people ponder what will this child become?

There is a nice play on words here. In the Hebrew, Zechariah's name means "YHWH remembers". Some would say, as a priest, he should have remembered the stories of his faith where Sarah, Hannah, Rachel, etc were granted children in their old age, whose fortunes God turned around, who were liberated through God's mighty deeds. But he did not, or he didn't see himself in God's great story. Until he stood there at the naming of his son, overwhelmed with joy and named him John meaning "YHWH is gracious". Present and alive.

Zechariah responds, praising God saying, John "will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." And this salvation will come as tender as a newborn child, illuminating our hearts and leading us into the way of peace. John now blessed and consecrated as a part of God's plan to liberate the world, the announcer of the good news of Jesus.

Zachariah's blessing John lays the foundation for him to fulfill God's promise to him. And with that foundation, John it says, grew in body and spirit and in preparation until it was time for him to answer his call.

We too are called to bless and sanctify our children, to recognize the miracle they each represent and to build for them a foundation that prepares them to be followers of Jesus, neighbors, and global citizens.

I told you last week that my family is moving. We still are. And anyone who's bought a house knows that part of the inspection is the checking of the foundation. Beth and I have a tendency to love old homes and fixer-upper's. I was reminded this week of one of the houses we bought. It was a 1922 bungalow and we bought this house for \$27,000. Can you imagine? Turns out there were several reasons it was so "affordable". After the inspection, our home insurance agency called us and said this house is uninsurable. We were given 30 days to fix the foundation and put on a new roof to keep our policy. We got busy. We had a roofer come out and he said he could replace the roof but you have to do the foundation first. Everything depends on the foundation.

As we think about Advent, being drawn home this Advent is important to assess the foundation upon which we are building our faith. Many of you have a strong and firm foundation, your faith has enabled you to weather great storms, floods, wind and snow and your faith has not been shaken. If this is you, then please share your story with us so that we might be inspired and strengthened by your resolve.

Others in this congregation grew up in a different faith tradition or of no tradition. Some of you have been wounded by the church. Some of you were taught bad theology. Some of you may be struggling with your faith this Advent season. Some of you may be disappointed in the Church.

Check your foundation. Maybe it's cracked. Maybe the bad theology that you were taught all your life has left you full of holes, left you seeking the love and security of a community where you can grow strong in your spirit.

Here's the thing about foundations, they can crack, they can sag, they can be damaged and still remain strong enough to uphold the home. And more importantly, they can also be fixed. Cracks can be filled in, things can be made level, foundations can be made strong again, safe and worthy of the house which sits upon it. Foundations can be rebuilt.

The image the Church projects of Jesus is vital to our survival and relevance in the world. The foundation of the Church has cracks in it. It has been mired and weakened by sexual abuse, homophobia, misogyny and white supremacy. The good news is, we are called to be but kin\_dom builders and we can fix those cracks, be repairers of the breach and build this place as a house of healing, radical hospitality, inclusion and worship - a true and just reflection of God in the world, for generations to come.

This Advent, like Zechariah, we are called to be open to a new thing God is doing. We are called to trust, to make space in our lives and in our imaginations for God's blessings to break through. Like John, we are called to recognize God's hand upon our lives and prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord who will guide us in the path of peace.

The good news is this. Jesus is coming to be our liberator, healer, advocate, and comforter. And it is on his legacy that this church is built and it was done so to give honor and glory to our creator God who calls us still to be builders of the kin\_dom. And that starts by laying a good foundation.