

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
8 September 2019
XII Trinity
Proper 18 Year C RCL
Jeremiah 18: 1-11
Psalm 139: 1-5, 12-17
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14: 25-33**

Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish...

Let's talk about foundations for a minute. There are bound to be some builders here among us. Who know a lot about foundations and how they are built. I appreciate seeing strong buildings that are built well and that last a long time, that are extremely well constructed. There are a number of excellent examples here in Spain — El Palacio Real, Cibeles, Alhambra, La Universidad de Salamanca. One of the most outstanding, and longstanding, is the Pantheon in Rome. Built in the first century, it has survived two thousand years and is the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world with a 3 meter oculus, an open hole, in the center of the roof. Into which the rain and wind and pigeons, and occasionally snow can fall undeterred. It is an amazing building and obviously it is built on a firm foundation, still standing two millennia later. Built on a strong stable foundation.

You will remember the familiar parable of Jesus about the building of houses on sand versus building on stone — the one on sand, being washed away, the one on stone standing firm against the storm and the flood. We are recommended to build on a strong foundation. But is that really what the gospel is saying? For even when a house is built on a strong foundation it can still be vulnerable.

Just look at what has happened in our life times. Earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, the recent severe storms and flooding here in Spain. And I am particularly struck this week by the devastation of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas and the southeastern United States. The island of Abaco was essentially obliterated. One headline yesterday read, 'On Dorian-Battered Island, What's Left? Virtually Nothing.' And the lead quote by one resident of that devastated island in the Bahamas was, "This ain't no place for anyone at the moment." The article went on to say, "No schools. No banks. No gas stations. No supermarkets. No restaurants. No churches. No pharmacies. No hardware stores. No water, no electricity and no phone lines. In this part of the Bahamas, nearly everything is gone."

Tens of thousands of lives totally upended, traumatized, with nothing material left. All in ruins. And no idea how many dead and missing; those still alive and isolated have no way to communicate; and no food or water. And the storm went on to batter the southeastern coast of the United States. Charleston, South Carolina, where I did my medical training, had eight feet

of water in the streets and into houses and businesses and churches. There are over forty Episcopal (Anglican) churches in downtown Charleston. Eight feet of water here in St. George's would be up to here...

You know, it is easy to get disaster fatigue. So much happens in the world and our news is continuous and global. How much can we absorb? Shootings, terrorist attacks, train bombings here in Madrid, trucks ramming crowds in Nice, France. How much can we absorb? We can become numb. But for some reason, Hurricane Dorian has really resonated with my sensitivity to this disaster. In this work and lifestyle as an interim priest I eat almost all of my meals alone. Often at dinner I will set my iPhone on the table, pull out my wireless earphones, only one of them, so I can still hear and interact with the staff, and watch and catch up on the news. Usually it is pretty routine. But I can honestly say that over the last several days, every time I have seen the reports of the devastation of the Bahamas I have teared up. I'm not sure what the camareros, the waiters have thought... The reports and the videos have been staggering. Perhaps because I have been to Abaco, sailing, or because I lived in Charleston. Or...? God's children with disaster in their lives... How do we live with this? Make sense of it?

Even a good concrete or stone foundation, despite the lesson in the parable, doesn't prevent or protect against the tragedies we see today. And Jesus, in our gospel reading today gives us a tough message. If you don't hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even life itself... (If you) don't carry the cross and follow me...don't sit down and estimate the cost...don't build a good foundation...give up all your possessions...if you don't do all that...you cannot become my disciple... Tough stuff!

So what is He saying? What does he really mean? Or are we to take this Bible passage literally? I think he is using foundation as a metaphor for something solid on which we build our lives. *The Cambridge Dictionary of the English Language* has a number of definitions of foundation, including stone support underlying a building, the base coat of makeup, and an organization that donates money to charities. But the one that is relevant here today is "the basic ideas or structure from which something important develops."

I think that Jesus, here, is calling us to base our lives on something 'foundational.' Something that is unwavering, that cannot be washed away, knocked down, or flooded. I well remember the first time I was in the Holy Land and my driver was very proud to tell me that he was an Arab Christian. A Palestinian Christian. He said it with such a conviction and look of joy, peace and tranquility on his face that I knew that his faith was foundational to his life.

How foundational are our own lives of faith to our lives in the world? What do we do to live into that, to demonstrate that, to show that?

St. George's Anglican Church here in Madrid is at a crossroads. This is a period of interim, interregnum. At this very time there is an ad in the Church Times seeking your next chaplain. It is important that the foundation at St. George's is strong and stable to attract a good (great!) priest and to take St. George's into the next phase of its life. What are you doing to help that?

You may be a sides person, a fund raiser, a reader, one of the several vehicles of communication here (Pew Sheet, Grapevine, WhatsApp), volunteer your time in one of many ways (in the garden, repairs, bookstore, many ways) but is there something more you can do?

It is so easy to fall into a routine and do the same thing over and over, year after year. What about a refresh, a recharge? A new challenge?

One of my tasks here, as interim chaplain, is to reorganize and revitalize some of the ministries here. There are many things that need tending to, and more people to be involved. It is a truism that the 80/20 rule applies in most churches and volunteer organizations. Eighty percent of the work is done by twenty percent of the people. We are currently reorganizing and revitalizing ministries here. Help is needed as sides persons, readers, chalice ministers, perhaps acolytes, Sunday School teachers, event organizers, and more. There are many opportunities. I am hoping that many of you will prayerfully consider what you can do and talk with me and/or the wardens about it. And I may well tap you on the shoulder as well. We need more people involved. Wouldn't it be nice to see the 80/20 rule converted to at least 50/50, or even better? This is a foundational time for St. George's. And for each of us personally. For none of us knows when disaster will hit, or on which day we may take our last breath. But whatever, whenever, our foundations should be strong.

Many of you know that my mother recently died. To get through this time of grief, as I have during several other times of intense grief in my life, I have gone back to my foundation of reading the Daily Office, Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline, with deep intentionality. As I discovered over forty years ago when I first found the Anglican Church, and became involved, being a part of this community is foundational. And a strong, very strong, foundation. I found it when I met the Episcopal Church as a college student in 1972. I was invited in to get involved...and did. I pray the same for you. But you have to step in and get wet. However, I give you a caution — be careful. I certainly never had any intention of becoming a priest... Yet still I say to you, 'Come on in...the water is fine!'

What can you do?

Amen.