

2 Lent B

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm curious if any of you are curious about the hard working bulldozer in the picture. It caught my imagination to think about this one lone person working the land – preparing for... what? Did they know? Were they certain things would work out?

The cleared land is like an empty canvas, but there's no paint insight, no artist, no brushes or tools. And yet the first steps are being taken to prepare. To me the picture is one of hope and trust. Hope that preparations will not be in vain, hope that it will all work out. And trust, that God would provide, that the work would not be accomplished alone.

Does anyone know where this picture might be from?

It's a picture of the ground being cleared in preparation for Holy Spirit Lutheran Church to be built.

More than 50 years ago God gathered people of faith in this neighbourhood, calling them to build, invite, worship, work, and serve as God's faithful have done for eternity. There was no guarantee, no stockpile of funds, no fat membership list, no governance manual, no classrooms, no rental groups.

There was a pastor, Ted Chell, and a lot of ambition, dreaming, and I imagine certainty in God's calling. Where the land was cleared God would build a church. Where funds were needed God would inspire. Where the church was empty God would help them fill it. Where struggle happened God would walk with them.

And day by day, God did provide. Not magically, like coins-raining-from-the-sky type miracles. We know well enough that we don't just pray for things and expect that God will do the work. What actually happens is that we learn to embrace and live in faith.

I'm not sure I can actually grasp the amount of hard work and commitment it took to build a church from the ground up. But this picture

demonstrates two important things: i) even one person makes a difference (that's become very important here at Holy Spirit as we continue to affirm "all are welcome;") ii) God calls us to look to the future. (No one is going to move earth around for the sake of playing in the dirt; this picture, as I said is hopeful and trusting because it's the beginning of building for the future.)

In Mark's Gospel today, we hear Jesus preparing the soil for the future. The hard work he was to undertake was to be killed and rise after three days. His followers objected because they didn't yet understand what it meant to follow him. They wanted things to be easier, to be neat and tidy. As far as they were concerned the kingdom could come without sweat of their brow, without bloodshed, without sacrifice – *if it's good after all* – it should be easy right? A thought that Jesus clearly rebukes. He would have no part of anyone diminishing the importance or objective of his radical love.

Jesus' death wasn't meant to be like an exclamation mark at the end of a life. His telling his followers that he would die wasn't an attempt to be dramatic or to solicit sympathy or even to test fidelity. It was all about laying groundwork for the future. It was all about commitment to a vision for a new world, a commitment to love that is endless. Jesus was willing to lose his life for the sake of the gospel, because the future of God's people is more important than himself.

The disciples were thinking only of the moment, only of their own lives – which was about as far into the future as they could see. They had no idea of where Jesus was going with this death and resurrection idea, no concept of the depth of love, of billions of followers to come, they had no notion of the cornerstone that was about to be laid. We cannot profit if we limit our vision to today or to our own perspectives. As people of the church we are called to put on our "God glasses" every day.

Following Christ is always about looking to the future. Because of this, because we don't know what the future will bring, we therefore put our complete trust in God to guide and build with us. We put our trust in God when times are good and not so good. We put our backs into the work of being a church, we put in our sweat and commitment, our ideas and energy, our prayers and offerings. We're willing to make sacrifices that the world doesn't understand, volunteer our time, help with worship and committees and snow shoveling, coffee making or anything else that needs doing - *and not just because things need to get done*, but because we too are looking ahead. We are looking to the future. What we build today needs to serve those after us, just as the work of that one person on the bulldozer cleared the ground for years of ministry to come.

I bet he had no idea that day of where God would take this church. I bet he didn't even imagine a future expansion, a community garden, a daycare and so much more. He just did what he was called to do in the moment, trusting that God could use him and his work. He's a contemporary "Abraham" who believed in God's promise of a multitude of followers, or perhaps as a "Mary" who said yes, or as a "Paul" who gathered the first churches.

What is it that we cannot yet see, but that God has in store? Trusting in that future, of things unseen, we gather together in the work of ministry trusting that God is leading.

Thanks be to God!