

June 27, 2010 – Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copples [PDF] (2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62)

So parish family and friends, honored guests and visitors, we start with a pop quiz. What is the theme of this morning's service? It's in the collect, it's in the hymns [humming], right? Foundation. The prophets and the apostles are the foundation of the church. Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. That's the collect. And then we have these great hymns to help gather us up and these thoughts of the church and our foundation. Now, foundation is kind of a rich metaphor. Those of us who have ever bought homes or sold homes have quaked in our boots at the dread of hearing those fateful words, "There's something wrong with the foundation." It has killed many a house closing deal. So we love a good foundation. A good foundation is very important, but important for what? I mean, you don't just sort of build a foundation and stand back and say, "That is the greatest foundation. Our work is done here." No, foundations presuppose a purpose of support and strength. Foundations presuppose building that is ahead. The point of a strong foundation is to build an even stronger structure that can withstand forces of nature. That can withstand the forces of family, of work, of life. It's to build a structure that can both provide comfort and safety as also respite and energy to go forward. What we build on our foundation matters, the materials matter, the workers, the skills matter.

Many of you have laid parts of the foundation of this church, both in a physical sense and a spiritual sense and an emotional sense and a financial sense. This is a very hands-on congregation. We like to build things. We like to build schools. We like to build community. But foundation is also a tricky metaphor, isn't it? Because with foundations, yes, come a certain amount of stability. With our buildings come a certain amount of stability, but if we're not careful, it can also lead to a certain amount of immobility, a great stand and standing still. Stability that leads to stagnation, something very easy for churches to do.

The Gospel lesson with great, great foreshadowing in the reading from the Old Testament, the Gospel lesson is about a prophet on the move. The Gospel lesson is about building toward something with movement and journey and danger. The lesson of Jesus and his disciples as well as Elijah and his disciple Elisha is how do we prepare to follow the one who is leading us in a dangerous, exhilarating and transforming journey ahead. Jesus is on the move. He has set his face to go to Jerusalem. To maybe put it a little more in the sense of the vernacular, he has to put on his game face. If any of you perhaps are watching a lot of sports this week, you have seen a lot of game face, whether it's at Wimbledon, whether it's at the wonderful World Cup events on various pitches, you have seen people put on their game face when they know they're going to meet opposition, when they know they're going to meet resistance, when they know they're going to meet perhaps even hostility and rejection as Jesus does in some villages or another. Jesus puts on his game face. He sets his face toward Jerusalem. There's a certain kind of single-mindedness and intensity of purpose that Jesus moves with.

And along the way various disciples tell Jesus that they will follow him if they can just take care of some other business first. And Jesus gives us these very disturbing, provocative comments. Because of course he is, through the writer of the Gospel of Luke, talking to us as well as to the disciples at hand, "Let the dead bury their dead. If you want to follow me, you can't even look behind and say goodbye to those at home.:" Surely these are too harsh a sayings for us to take on.

But Jesus is calling us away from a culture that is a death dealing culture. Jesus is calling us to keep our eyes focused on a direction. I had to go talk to some people who have ever plowed. I for one have not plowed, but my understanding is once you put your hands to the plow hitched to the horse, if you look back, you run the danger of the plow going one way and the horse going the other and all the work that you have done has come to naught. There is a steadiness of purpose, a focus, a direction, a vision that comes with following Jesus. But about this direction, it is a direction to life, it is a direction that is upward, it is always a direction that involves going through suffering. Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem because he knows that suffering and rejection are ahead. He knows that this discipleship will be costly and he's trying to get that across to his followers, good ol' James and John. No wonder they're called the sons of thunder. They are so ready to rain down destruction on the Samaritan village that refuses to accept Jesus on their terms. And Jesus turns and rebukes them. It's hard to follow Jesus. It's hard to understand what's demanded by following Jesus. But those who are not yet ready to go are left in peace while the disciples, while the community, while the beloved go on.

Pentecost is the season of the church. The church is not just our building or our foundation. It is our vehicle for proclamation. What Jesus is telling his disciples is that we must be fit to proclaim the kingdom of God. We have to be careful that our stability, as valuable as that is, does not turn into something that's complacent and comfortable and stagnant. We have to be watchful and careful that the church is a vehicle of freedom for all people and not just a comfortable retreat from people who are "different" from us. We have to be careful that our church is moving forward not so much to preserve on our own traditions and values, but to move forward, to anticipate where God is sending us to proclaim this message.

Anticipation, as you all know who've heard me preach for many years, is one of my favorite themes. We tend to think about it in Advent as we prepare for the Lord, but as I've watched just a little bit of football, I've been reminded from watching my own children play soccer and basketball and other sports that a great deal of degree of effectiveness comes from anticipation. You anticipate where the ball is going or coming. You anticipate where your opponent is about to cut. You anticipate where your teammate is, hopefully not offsides, in order to make a pass. You anticipate where you need to be to receive the pass. Anticipation means movement. Anticipation means understanding how we move together to proclaim the kingdom of God. Where might we anticipate meeting the world's great needs? Where might we anticipate a need for this church to move out in patience, in courage and love?

We like a lot of building. We have spent a lot of time and resources on asphalt, on bricks and mortar of various kinds and it's very important. But our vehicles must always be just that, vehicles of proclamation. If our grounds and buildings are clearly marked as places of hospitality and welcome, then it is a vehicle of proclaiming the Gospel. If our outreach is clearly described as something not condescending or patronizing or noblesse oblige, but to be servant of all because of how Christ has served us, then we are proclaiming that Gospel.

I don't know how many of you all looked at your Episcopal News that came tucked in with your diocesan newspaper this week, but there was a marvelous picture of a mural, a mural of the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan on the side of Trinity Church Haiti - Trinity Church, Port-

au-Prince, Haiti, a wall that did not fall, miraculously enough, during the earthquake. There's a great debate going on about how to preserve this gorgeous Haitian mural that's such a witness of a culture of Haiti celebrating the gift of the Gospel. Do they just preserve it, move it somehow into a museum? Does it remain as a foundational piece of that church or do they just start over? Though I would not dare to say what the correct architectural response is to preserving this mural, what's interesting is of all the things to build and rebuild in Haiti, how important it is and how clearly it's being expressed by the people of Haiti that they will rebuild their church and that this mural, one way or another, will be a sign of that enduring presence of the Holy Spirit of baptism that parts the waters as Elisha did and brings us into a new land and into a new life.

Saint Paul tells us that for this journey and for the vehicle of our travel we need to put on our game face, but it will not be a face of hostility or antagonism or judgment or condemnation, but it will be the face that is the fruit of the spirit, the face of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. There is no law against such things. If we the disciples of Christ will be ruled by the law of love and service of neighbor, then we will be ready to anticipate God's call and race to meet it and we will know the joy of heaven, whatever pains of this earth it puts us through and not just later, but in our very midst. Amen.