

Planting Hope: Foundations Acts 1:3-8

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The famous author of the *Alice in Wonderland* book series, Lewis Carroll, is credited with the phrase: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” The phrase has its origins in a conversation between the Cheshire Cat and Alice. But the quote, as famous as it is, isn’t quite right. Here’s the original conversation:

Alice asks the Cheshire Cat, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” The Cat responds, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice thinks for a moment and then says, “I don’t much care where I go.” To which the Cat responds, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.” “As long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation. “Oh, you’re sure to do that,” says the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

Even if it’s not exactly right, it is a pretty decent paraphrase: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” I mean, how can you pick a road, choose a route to somewhere when you don’t know where you are going? How do you get from “Here” to “There” when you don’t know or don’t care where “There” is?

Last week, Pastor Jeff challenged us to begin this new year thinking critically about “There.” He helped us start this brand-new year off with intention; to give voice to our Spirit-led hopes and dreams and commit those hopes and dreams to the Lord. As we begin a new year, it only makes sense that we articulate our hopes and dreams for the future by taking some time in the present to be clear about where “There” is. If you were here or watched online, you know that Jeff had us focus on five key areas of our lives. Jeff asked us to articulate our hopes and dreams for our relationships, for our spirituality, for our physical bodies, for our minds, and our hearts, and our emotions. This is missional, foundational work because it helps us chart a path to our “There” as individuals and as a congregation. Think about it: how powerful

would it be to commit this year, 2022, to being a year where we become clear together about who we are, what we’re doing here, where we’re going, and how we’ll get “There!” That’s foundational work. That’s building a solid foundation as we press on with our mission into this brand-new year.

After Jesus’s resurrection, he challenged his followers to do the same thing. Jesus wanted them to be clear about their mission. And being clear about their mission meant building a solid foundation. We read about all of that in Acts 1:3-8 (The Message):

After his death, [Jesus] presented himself alive to [the Apostles] in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God. As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but “must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon.”

When they were together for the last time, they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?” He told them, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.”

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As always, there’s so much going on here. So let me lift out a few important things.

First, it’s foundational that the community of faith gathers in face-to-face meetings. Gathering for worship, investment in bible studies and small group conversations, serving the wider community, practicing generosity are foundational practices that back a couple of thousand years.

Second, understanding the character of the kingdom of God is essential for any faith community. What the kingdom of God looks like and how the Spirit brings the kingdom into focus in and through the local community of faith is foundational.

Third, sharing meals together, whether that’s celebrating communion here or providing food for the community through Mission Outpost, is always at

the heart of what we do. These are just some of the foundational practices that the church has committed to over the centuries.

But it's really in the last part of the passage where we understand our mission and continue to build a foundation for going forward. The disciples asked Jesus about the kingdom of God and if Jesus was going to make it happen all at once in that moment. Jesus responds to his well-intentioned followers with this, and I'm paraphrasing: "Nope, you're going to do that." And then Jesus went on to lay the foundation for how that was going to happen, starting with this good news: "Nope, you're going to do that. But you won't do that alone. The Spirit will come upon you," Jesus said. They would not be alone. The Holy Spirit would equip and empower them for everything they would do. This reminds us of the good news that God never calls us to do something without equipping us actually to do it. Disciples are never alone.

But then Jesus went on to describe the scope of their work: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world." Jesus was describing for disciples in every age and time exactly where "There" is. It's easy: Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world. That is a very clear scope. But he must have known that the disciples would sort of wonder about that.

In my imagination, I see how this could have all gone in the wrong direction. Jesus telling his disciples that he was sending them on a mission. And the disciples ask him, "Would you tell us, please, which way we ought to go from here?" to which Jesus responds, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." The disciples think for a moment and then say, "We don't much care where." To which Jesus replies, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." To which the disciples reply, "As long as we get somewhere...right?" "Oh, you're sure to do that," said Jesus, "if you only walk long enough."

Rather absurd, isn't it? It would be absurd if we did that as a church, as a congregation, as the people of God. As we think about laying a solid foundation for the way forward into 2022, we look to Jesus who was clear then and is clear now: Jesus says to us, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world." This was as if Jesus was saying, "You will be my witness on a local, national and international scale." Jerusalem, local. Judea and Samaria, national. The world, global.

We're beginning this brand new series – Planting Hope - for this brand new year, with the expectation that God will do something brand new through this community of faith and through us. So beginning today and moving through the next several weeks, we're going to provide a very clear way forward by laying a very strong foundation as we move into our future together. We're asking and will articulate this question over the next several weeks: How will we plant hope in and through this community of faith to plant hope around the world? What is our witness? That is a very missional and foundational question.

There are three ways to ask this: What is our local witness. What's our Jerusalem? How will we be a national witness? What's your Judea? How will you be a global witness? What's your "end of the earth?" Let's break that down.

First, how will we become more effective local witnesses? What's our Jerusalem? Jesus first called disciples to be witnesses in "Jerusalem." That was their backyard, their neighborhood, their city. We ask, what needs exist in our backyard? God commanded the Israelites to leave the edges of their fields unharvested so that the orphans, the widows, and the people who were forced from their homes could find food to glean. Our Mission Outpost "gleans" the shelves of local markets and makes those resources available to people in need in our own community. And, of course, we offer so much more than food! People need clothing, furniture, dental care, spiritual guidance. What are the needs that exist that we're not even aware of yet?

A core piece of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church's identity that we've embraced from the very beginning is that we're a congregation that believes that God has called us to go "OUT...for the World." And we do this by providing tangible hope to people who have come to the end of themselves. We meet them right there with a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

We're going to highlight the biblical foundation for our work through Mission Outpost, to lift up both the ministry we do by God's grace and the partnerships that God has made possible. So the challenge I'm giving you today, knowing that you won't be doing this all on your own, that the Spirit empowers us to do this, is to ask yourself, What is your "Jerusalem"? How will you become a partner in this local witness?

Second, how will we become more effective national witnesses? What's your "Judea"? Finding clarity about how to make an impact beyond one's own

local community is what Jesus challenged the early church to do. The dedication of our brand new Mission Outpost space in 2 weeks will certainly be a grand beginning. But that's just it, it's just a beginning. We'll have to learn to think bigger, and strategize wider to meet the needs that exist well beyond our own local area. Asking the question, What is our Judea? challenges us to think broader, more expansively. That impacts what we do with and through organizations like Feed My Starving Children. So the challenge I'm giving you today, knowing that you won't be doing this all on your own, that the Spirit empowers us to do this, is to ask yourself: What is your "Judea and Samaria"? How will you become a partner in this national witness?

Third, how will you be a global witness? What's your "ends of the earth"? In case you missed it, Prince of Peace now has a "global presence." That's what happens when an entire community of faith has to "go online" for a season. With all due respect, and please hear me, I would never want to understate the gravity of what happened as a result of a global pandemic, but one of the things we learned to do and do well, I think you'll agree, is to work well and efficiently and with a great deal of care and creativity to extend the invitation to worship with us to people around the globe; people with whom we share a planet. That's become part of our global witness.

And speaking of that, from the beginning of the biblical story, human beings have been called to be stewards of the earth. We don't need to get caught up in the politics of global warming or the arguments about how much human activity is impacting climate change. We do, however, need to respond to God's call to care for this planet, and that calling mandates that we do some things differently. Our response to the needs of God's creation comes out of our sense of wonder at the beauty and gift of creation.

So the challenge I'm giving you today, knowing that you won't be doing this all on your own, that the Spirit empowers us to do this, is to ask yourself, "What is your 'ends of the earth'?" How will you become a partner in our global witness?

We're building our foundation as a community of faith. As we move into this new year, we want to be clear about our witness to Jesus, the resurrected Lord who both calls and equips us as disciples in the 21st century to answer the questions: What is our local witness; what's our "Jerusalem"? How will we continue to be a national witness; what's our "Judea and Samaria"?

And, how will we be a global witness; what's our "ends of the earth"? The Spirit is already at work in us to build upon that foundation.

Let's pray...