

Pentecost 25C  
Peace, Seattle  
October 23, 2016  
Jeremiah 14:1-10, 19-22  
Luke 18:9-14

## **A NEW FOUNDATION**

**The 600-mile long plateau on the west side of the Andes Mountains is one of the driest expanses of ground on the planet. Its barren soil has been compared to the surface of Mars. Some parts of this desert landscape, it is said, have not seen rain for a thousand years.**

When Charles Darwin passed through the region during his 19<sup>th</sup> century voyage around the world, he called the Atacama Desert “a barrier far worse than the most turbulent ocean.”<sup>1</sup>

**The setting for our first reading is not far, spiritually speaking, from this desert wasteland, for a great drought holds the land of Judah in its grip.<sup>2</sup>**

**In the verses just before our text, the prophet Jeremiah sets the scene for us:**

- The creeks and wadis have all dried up;
- The cisterns are empty; the ground is cracked.
- The farmers cover their heads in disbelief.
- And human beings are not alone in their despair—in the absence of grassland, doe’s abandon their newborn fawns and wild asses pant for air like jackals. All creation is suffering.

But unlike the geological and geographical forces that conspired over the ages to create the Atacama, this drought, says Jeremiah, can be traced to human sin. In the face of Judah’s rampant infidelity—its failure to uphold justice, its opportunistic turning toward other gods—God has withdrawn God’s blessing and with it, the rain on which all living things depend.

**The drought is a wakeup call that can’t be ignored.**

Our reading sets us down right in the middle of a back and forth between Jeremiah and the LORD over this crisis, and at the end of our reading there’s still no resolution or relief in sight.

**Last week I spoke of the film THE 33, which tells the true story of what happened in 2010 when a century-old mine in the Atacama collapsed, trapping 33 miners 2,000 feet below the surface.<sup>3</sup>**

I told of the family members of the miners who rallied on behalf of their husbands, brothers, uncles, lovers—entombed 200 stories below the ground. And I spoke of one woman in particular, Maria Segovia, who in her refusal to accept their deaths as inevitable led the cry for the miners’ rescue.<sup>4</sup>

Maria, I said, embodied the bold, relentless voice of the widow in Jesus’ parable about prayer: she never lost heart and never gave up.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Héctor Tobar, *Deep, Down, Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle That Set Them Free* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014 ) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 14:1-6

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.the33movie.com/> The film is based on Héctor Tobar’s book, *Deep, Down, Dark*. ( ) For a shorter version of the story, see Tobar’s *Sixty-Nine Days*, published in July 7, 2014 issue of *The New Yorker Magazine*. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/07/07/sixty-nine-days>

<sup>4</sup> You can find my 10-16-2016 sermon here: [http://www.peacelutheranseattle.org/?page\\_id=49&sermon\\_id=286](http://www.peacelutheranseattle.org/?page_id=49&sermon_id=286)

Today's readings are also about prayer, beginning with Jeremiah's soulful plea that God turn from anger and come to the aid of God's people; and continuing with another parable of Jesus in which he contrasts the prayer styles of two men – one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector; one self-assured and confident; the other conscience-struck and self-effacing.

Last week in the story of The 33, we stayed on the surface with the family members of the miners. This week we go deep down into the dark recesses of the mine where The 33 are huddled in a cave-like formation carved from solid rock called REFUGIO—The Refuge.

After the initial shock at finding themselves captive in the bowels of the mountain; after attempts to find a way out prove fruitless; a sense of great powerlessness begins to sink in, and the 33 men go through a kind of transformation.

One of them, José Henríquez, a devout Evangelical Christian, is called upon to pray for them all. Dropping to his knees, and telling the others to follow suit, because prayer, he says, begins with humility, José prays:

WE AREN'T THE BEST MEN, BUT LORD, HAVE PITY ON US...

LET US ENTER THE SACRED THRONE OF YOUR GRACE...

WE ARE SINNERS AND WE NEED YOU. THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN HUMANLY DO WITHOUT YOUR HELP. PLEASE, LORD, TAKE CHARGE OF THIS SITUATION.<sup>5</sup>

The prayer resonates with the men, and from that day onward prayer becomes a daily ritual which is followed by their once daily meal, a meal at which they divide their meager rations—one-half of a cookie and a few swallows of oil-laced industrial water—in a kind of holy communion.

There is something pure and true about the community life that begins to emerge when the men come face to face with their mortality at the beginning of what will become 69 days of captivity before they are finally rescued.

The hour of prayer at noon becomes for the men a time for confessing transgressions—large & small—and reconciling with each other—"I'm sorry I raised my voice. I'm sorry I didn't help get the water."

Many days later, after rescuers successfully drill a small hole that enables food and communication to pass between the outside world and the 33, this sense of community is challenged.

Promises of fame and fortune generated by the media frenzy on the surface above, make their way down to the men. The perceptions and the promises of strangers on the outside—including wealthy celebrities—stir jealousies below; and frictions rise.

When this happens, it's the shadows originating within the men—not the physical darkness around them—that end up posing the biggest threat to their ability to hold together.

The insight of the tax collector in our parable today is his deep awareness of his own shadow and his own inability to get things right. Yet in spite of this it is he and not the Pharisee—whom Jesus lifts up as a model for us!

**God, it turns out, doesn't want perfection from us. God wants honesty.**

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<sup>5</sup> This story and other stories from their captivity is told in careful detail in *Deep, Down, Dark*. p. 94.

When Carl Jung was an old man, one of his students, who'd been reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, asked him, "What has your pilgrimage really been?"

Jung answered: "In my case Pilgrim's Progress consisted in my having to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am."<sup>6</sup>

In his book *FALLING UPWARD*, Richard Rohr writes:

God knows that all of us will fall somehow... God must say after each failure of ours, "Oh, here is a great opportunity! Let's see how we can work with this!" [And] after our ego-inflating successes, God surely says, "Well, nothing new or good is going to happen here!"

Rohr goes on:

Communities and commitment can form around suffering much more than around how wonderful or superior we are... There is a strange and even wonderful communion in real human pain... [that makes it] a more honest doorway into lasting communion than... [shared] happiness.<sup>7</sup>

**Today our community is being expanded once more as we welcome Amelia, Ryan, and Zoey into the Body of Christ and into our fellowship at Peace. Looking at these beautiful, young lives fills our hearts with hope and joy!**

**Parents:** At their tender age, it's hard to imagine that these little ones possess a shadow side; that they will ever disappoint you or talk back to you or make you so frustrated that you want to pull your hair out—and that's all well and good! You're storing away lots of love and good feelings and golden memories; all of which you'll need when more challenging stages come... and they will come.

We speak of baptism being a kind of rebirth because we recognize that there's a propensity that comes with being human—an inclination to want to trust ourselves to build our own foundation for life, rather than the One who created us.

Medieval mystic Julian of Norwich said that only in the falling apart of our own foundation can we experience God as our total foundation and our real foundation.<sup>8</sup> Without that falling apart, we keep creating our own foundation.

**What the tax collector in Jesus' parable was doing, what The 33 began to do in prayer, was to let the self-made foundation crumble so that God's foundation could become their reality.**

We bring our children to baptism because we recognize the need for a power greater than ourselves to whom we can entrust their lives: the Triune God, who re-orientes our lives in this water, welcoming us with a love both fierce and tender that abides with us whatever circumstances we may face as we journey through this life.

This God, who meets us in the water of the font, became one with us in Jesus, embodying the full human experience, showing us with his own life how far he is willing to go to repair what is broken in our lives and in our world.

When we make the sign of his cross on Zoey, Ryan and Amelia, we're claiming for them the faith that says: NOTHING in their experience, no circumstances they'll ever encounter, no shadows that will be

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<sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung *Letters, Volume 1*, selected and edited by Gerhard Adler in collaboration with Aniela Jaffe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), footnote 8, p. 19. Quoted in Rohr's *Daily Meditation*, 10/19/16. <http://centerforactionandcontemplation.com/t/ViewEmail/d/114FC0DA640B42E8/281C5472D20A0A9DC67FD2F38AC4859C>

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rohr. *Falling Upward*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter 78. Quoted in Rohr's *Daily Meditation*, op. cit.

revealed within them or around them—absolutely NOTHING in all of creation—will be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Baptism is the beginning of a whole life of formation; of living into that truth. And that, my friends, that is a promise worth building our lives around.

Amen? Amen.