

*Home's Foundation*

A sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron,  
With the People of St. Mary's, Anchorage  
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I stink at waiting.

Waiting for others, waiting for the right time ....

I didn't like waiting to grow up,

And now, I don't like waiting to loosen up, or recover....

Of the 2 traditional themes of Advent, waiting and preparing,

I much prefer preparing....although if I'm honest,

Preparing is still not my *favorite*.

Like most of us, I think of completion as the point.

Finishing, accomplishing....

that's when the victory lap is taken,

when singing begins

and deep satisfaction settles in.

And yet, this morning, we share Zechariah's song

Which is a song of blessing that is all about preparing.

In our theme of *home*, we can understand it as laying the foundation.

Which is why I have been thinking this week of John Teal.

Do you know of John Teal? Born 1920s, Harvard and Yale trained

In 1940s -50s, John Teal saw 2 imminent difficulties--

1. Musk ox facing extinction, and
2. Alaska and other Arctic communities moving into cash economies, and facing difficulty around sustainability

“he saw an opportunity for [Arctic] people to live peaceably with this animal such that both would thrive”

After a decade of research, Teal began the Musk Ox Project in Fairbanks in 1954

- Preserve musk ox from extinction
- Domestic breeding of musk ox
- Social change in Arctic villages toward economic sustainability

John Teal died in 1982, and the musk ox were not yet domesticated.

Today, they still are not. We are generations away, I am told.

In fact, John Teal knew that he would not live to see their domestication.

He knew that it was work that would require decades of work after his own life was over.

Yet he began.

He laid a foundation, doing incremental work toward a long goal.

I feel much the same way in the face of European cathedrals. No one began building Notre Dame or Chartre, thinking that they would see its completion.

And yet they began.

This doesn't come naturally to many of us.

We tend to like a project plan with a clear beginning, middle, and end--

And an end date within reach.

I suspect that ancient folk were not as different as we might imagine.

After Zechariah and Elizabeth give John an unexpected name,

The townsfolk wonder aloud, “What will this child become?”

John sings a blessing into this young life--

It is a song of hopeful vision

Remembers prophets of old,

Promises of God's redemption and salvation

And places his son's life into that lineage--

Not as the *completion* of all of God's promises--

But as one more beloved child who will prepare the way  
for the fulfillment of God's Promises.

Incremental work.

Doing ONE part of work

that will take more generations than we can, even now, count.

Zechariah casts a HOPEFUL VISION worth living for

Knowledge of salvation

Forgiveness of sin

God's tender mercy

Light breaking through in dark days

A Light that guides us into the way of peace.

This HOPEFUL VISION is worth living for

Even if we do not see its completion

(by now, we suspect that we will not see its completion).

In marriage prep, I love to ask couples to tell me where/how/from whom they learned how to love, and how to sustain loving relationships.

And then, we wonder together where *those* folx learned

I've often thought of it as pulling the string of their love backward,

Seeing how far back it reaches.

Today, I think of it as excavating the foundation.

Where/from whom have you learned how to live peaceably/how to dwell in love?

Digging more deeply, who taught them?

See how many generations have done the work before them...

The foundation of all of this, of course,

Is in the heart of God.

It comes to us through the work, the dreams, the visions

Of those who were faithful in their generation,

And it will live beyond us in those whose names we do not yet know

And whose faces we have not yet seen,

Who will live after our lives here are completed.

This is Good News, my friends!

It is a vision worth living for,

Worth investing in,

Worth building.