

Sermon by The Rev. Betsy Johns Roadman, 6/26/05
St. Augustine's Church, Croton-on-Hudson, New York
Text: Collect for the Day – Proper 8, Year A

Our family spent last weekend in Chicago, attending our oldest son's graduation from Northwestern University and all the events surrounding it. At the various gatherings, there were thoughtful, creative speakers - students, department chairs, campus ministers, the keynote speaker at the stadium – each of whom had something to share about this special time. And though the specifics of each address were different, the theme of every speech was, at its core, the same.

Each person spoke about the opportunities that lay before the graduates as this chapter of their lives ends, and as they enter a brand new season. Each speaker, in his or her own way, reminded the graduates that they had the opportunity and the privilege to make choices now that would have a positive impact on their own future and could benefit the lives of others with whom they would come in contact. For the graduates and their families, the joy and celebration of the accomplishment of finishing college was held in some tension with the sobering reality of choices to be made and next steps to be taken, as these young people begin the process of building their adult lives.

In preparing a sermon, I almost always focus on the Gospel passage appointed for the day, but given where I've been emotionally since last weekend, I'm not surprised that the collect caught my attention instead. This morning's collect is about foundations, and cornerstones, and the process of building. It speaks to choices, next steps, consequences, and intentionality.

In this prayer, Jesus is described as the cornerstone of the church. A cornerstone is a large stone placed in the foundation at the principal corner of a building. All else depends on it. There are references to cornerstones throughout the Bible, one of which is Job imagining God, in creation, laying the cornerstone upon which God then builds the world. It's an incredibly powerful image.

As we consider our own lives, what are the "stones" that we're choosing as we continue to build the structure that sustains and defines us? What is our cornerstone – the foundation upon which absolutely everything else rests, and by which everything else is measured and adjusted? Is it money, and the things that money can buy? Is it our family? Is it our career? Is it making a name for ourself?

The truth is that if God, most fully revealed to us as Christians in the person of Jesus Christ, isn't the cornerstone of the foundation of our life, then that foundation is not as sure and firm as we want it to be. The truth is that the stock market can completely tank, our family can splinter or implode, our career path can take an unplanned and unwelcomed detour, and the world's recognition of our importance, if it's registered at all, is likely to be fleeting. If any of those things are what's at our absolute center, the rest of the structure of our lives won't hold. The center – the cornerstone upon which all else rests, and against which all else is measured – has to be God. God's love and

presence is the only absolute, the only sure and certain thing. God alone is guaranteed not to fail us.

It would be wonderful if my son, the new college graduate, chooses, at this critical stage in his life, to intentionally make God the cornerstone upon which the structure of his life is built and in relationship to which all subsequent choices are based and next steps taken. But it's never too late for any of us to make that same choice. And no matter when in our life cycle that radical decision might be made, we still need to periodically check our foundation to ensure that, through inattention and neglect, we haven't allowed the structure of our lives to shift, subtly or not so subtly. God, as the cornerstone, is ever faithful and constant. But we forget, and we become distracted and careless. Some of the stones we're choosing to include in the building process of our lives might not be the most appropriate. We might be trying to cram so many other stones around the cornerstone that its position is compromised.

I wish I knew of a fool-proof formula for how to correct, re-figure, and maintain the foundation of our lives in order to put or keep God at the absolute center. That process will be different for each one of us, because we are uniquely created. But I can share with you a couple of things that I've realized this week about my own life, and what I need to do in order to more effectively build upon God as the cornerstone.

I'm learning that it's not enough for me to lead worship. I need to be, regularly, a participant in worship. I need to find a church that has a service that I can attend. When I was working at Christ's Church in Rye, the 5 p.m. Saturday service here at St. Augustine's was one of the places where I worshipped. Since coming on staff here, I've been careless about looking for another place to do that.

And, I'm learning that I need to attend to the intuitive side of my faith. I delve into Scripture, the Prayer Book, and our Anglican history not only because I've come to know God through them, but also because I promised to do that in my ordination vows. But God is bigger and broader than the institutional church, and that's what I sometimes forget. When I do, I can become discouraged about and worn down by the language and some of the doctrines of our tradition. I can become less than optimistic about the relevance of the church for our time and place. When I'm more intentional about balancing the riches that have been handed down to us over the centuries with, for example, inclusive language and feminine images of God, my soul is refreshed and nurtured, and I can then more fully appreciate and embrace the church that's held and grown my faith over so many years.

Maybe I've been reading too much about the Billy Graham crusade that's taking place in New York this weekend. I don't mean to sound like I'm making an altar call. But the questions need to be asked: Have we made the radical, yet utterly practical decision to choose God as the cornerstone of the foundation of our life? If not, what in the world are we waiting for? If so, have we taken a good look at that foundation recently to see if anything might have shifted? Our lives need to be built on a foundation that will stand no matter what. Amen.