

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
January 23, 2022

Our Savior Lutheran Church
Epiphany 3

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I recognize that we are the better part of a month beyond the celebration of Christmas.

I mean, Christmas is well behind us, and we are now focused on things like today's congregational meeting, and egg making, and the like.

I mean, all the church holiday decorations, the tree, the greens, the candelabras, the Advent wreath have now been put away, except the nativity scene, which we allow to stay up a little longer.

And our festive Christmas carols have now been replaced with Epiphany hymns.

So on and so forth.

Yes, we are pretty well beyond Christmas, but nonetheless I want to recall to our minds a very familiar Christmastime movie.

That movie is *It's a Wonderful Life* starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed.

PAUSE

Now, hopefully, we are all familiar with this most moving holiday movie.

Nonetheless, I remind us that the movie is about a man named George Bailey who lives in a town called Bedford Falls.

And if we remember the young George Bailey had all these passionate aspirations to become a builder.

George wanted to shake off the dust of his little town Bedford Falls, and he wanted to see the world and he wanted to build bridges, and skyscrapers, and the like.

Yes, George wanted to see the world, and then go to college to see what they know, and then...AND then he wanted to build things.

PAUSE

Now it so happens that I can sort of relate to George.

Not that I ever wanted to become a builder per se.

No, that was never my calling in life.

But my great great grandfather, Ernest Petruschke was a builder.

You see, Ernest emigrated to the United States with his young family in the 1880s.

And, by trade Ernest was a master stone mason.

Now, my great great grandfather and his family came to the New World, and eventually they settled in a little town in the state of Wisconsin, called Berlin.

Berlin, Wisconsin.

I actually find that somewhat ironic, because Ernest and his family emigrated from Berlin, Germany.

So they moved from one Berlin to another Berlin.

And, I imagine that at that time, Berlin, Wisconsin was probably not much different from the little town of Bedford Falls.

Actually, the Bedford Falls in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* was probably more built up than Berlin, Wisconsin, at the time my great great grandfather arrived, but nevertheless they were both small towns.

But as I was saying, I feel I can relate to George Bailey somewhat because as George wanted to be a builder, and my great great grandfather just happened to be a builder.

In fact, in Berlin, Wisconsin, Ernest literally built up the town.

He constructed buildings, sidewalks, and even a fountain in the center of the town's park.

And as a result of my great great grandfather's influence on the town, the name "Petruschke" is somewhat famous in Berlin, Wisconsin, at least with those who know something of the history of the town.

In fact, when I was working on my genealogy some years back, I called the historical society in Berlin, Wisconsin because I had some questions.

And I said my name was Joel Petruschke, and that I was doing some work on my family tree.

And the person asked, "Okay, sure. What can I help you with?"

And I said I needed some information on my great great grandfather Ernest Petruschke.

And the person replied, "Oh, you are that Petruschke."

So, I guess you could say my family is famous, at least in Berlin, Wisconsin.

PAUSE

So, yes, my family derives from a man who came to this country as a master stone mason.

And thus I can somewhat relate then to George Bailey, who himself wanted to become a builder.

But, in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, circumstances are such that George never achieves his goal.

He never goes off to college. He never travels the world.

Indeed, he never leaves Bedford Falls, and he never becomes a builder.

At least not in the sense of how the world understands the word "builder."

But, one could still argue, indeed one must argue, that George does become a builder.

For, George stays in Bedford Falls and he goes on to operate the business his father started.

He stays in Bedford Falls and operates the Bedford Falls Building and Loan, which serves to loan people money so that they can build up their lives.

The Building and Loan loans people money so that they can build a home, or use the money to follow their dreams whatever that may be.

George doesn't LITERALLY become a builder. He doesn't build bridges and skyscrapers.

But George does become a builder in his own right.

PAUSE

Now, I bring all this up today, not just because I really like the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, which I do.

To be sure, I make a point to watch the movie every holiday season.

No, I recall to our minds the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, not because I really like the movie.

But, I recall to mind the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, because it resonates so well with our gospel reading today.

PAUSE

Now, the Gospel reading today begins by Jesus RETURNING to the district of Galilee, which is a region around the Sea of Galilee, in the northern part of the Holy Land.

And where is Jesus returning from, but from the River Jordan, where he had been baptized by John the Baptist.

It is believed that John was baptizing toward the southern part of the Holy Land near the Dead Sea.

So Jesus is returning north from the place of his baptism, and the text says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus arrives in the town of Nazareth where he had been brought up.

Now, as an adult Jesus was not living in Nazareth.

His residence as an adult appears to have been in Capernaum, but for some reason after his baptism, Jesus returns to Nazareth, his childhood residence.

I don't know exactly why Jesus returned to Nazareth at this very early point in his ministry, but I have a thought, and I want to propose this thought for us to consider.

And that thought is this.

Jesus comes to Nazareth to announce his building project, for we see Jesus, too, was a builder.

Now, Jesus could have announced his building project in Capernaum, or Jerusalem, or any other place he would so choose.

But I think it is significant that Jesus announces his building project in Nazareth, the place where he was brought up.

Because we need to remember that Jesus in his younger days was no doubt an apprentice to his father Joseph, who as we know was himself a builder.

Joseph was a carpenter, and Jesus likely was a carpenter then, too, at least in his younger days.

And the Greek word for carpenter “tektōn,” can mean not only “carpenter,” but also “craftsmen,” and “builder.”

Now, if we didn't know, the town of Nazareth was only three miles from the town of Sepphoris, and even though Sepphoris is even mentioned in the Bible, it was an administrative center, a major trade center, and the capital of the district of Galilee.

And during the time when Joseph and Jesus were living and working, Sepphoris was experiencing something of a building boom under the reign of Herod Antipas.

So it is in all likelihood that Joseph and Jesus, as builders, were engaged in the building projects at Sepphoris.

The point being that now that Jesus is 30 years old, and has experienced a call from God, and has been baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns to the place of his upbringing, the place where he and father were builders...

Jesus returns to Nazareth to announce his newly conceived building project.

Albeit, this building project is not a bridge or a skyscraper...

Nor is this building project is going to need materials like wood and stone.

No, this building project is distinctive from the building he once did as a “tektōn.”

Indeed, this building project is described in the prophet Isaiah, the scroll from which Jesus reads in the synagogue.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

This is Jesus’ agenda for his ministry. This is Jesus’ blueprints for his building project.

And what is this building project exactly but the very Kingdom of God.

Jesus is still a builder, like he was when he and his father worked from their home base in Nazareth.

But now, Jesus is telling those folks in his hometown, that he has a new calling as a builder.

He is building the Kingdom of God.

PAUSE

That is why, I surmise, Jesus goes to the town of his upbringing, after he is baptized.

That is why Jesus arrives in Nazareth and makes this press statement in the synagogue, because Jesus is associating his former life as a builder to his new life as a builder.

And how this then connects with all of us today is that we, too, are to see ourselves as builders.

And you and I are on the job even now. And the job site is the world around us.

And our Lord Jesus is our foreman. He is the one who details the work that needs to be done.

“Tote that beam, hammer that nail, sand that floor.”

More accurately his directions are: care for the sick, feed the poor, house the homeless, and be merciful and kind always.

That is the way we build the Kingdom of God.

PAUSE

Today, then, as we meet to conduct our congregational meeting, we should be mindful that the work we do as a church is always about building.

The work we do as a church is about bringing the Kingdom of God into being.

We are builders, you and I, after all.

It is kind of like our forefathers who wanted to build this American society and did so on the principles that all people are created equal, and that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And so they built this nation with the people subscribing to those principles.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit is building God's Kingdom through the work of God's people, you and me.

And, when we do the work of Jesus Christ, our foreman...

When we do the work of caring for the sick, and feeding the poor, and housing the homeless...

When we do the work of mercy and kindness...

Well, then, we, too, will be able to say, like our Lord Jesus once said in synagogue in Nazareth...

"Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Today, the Kingdom of God is being built. Thanks be to God. Amen.