

Monday our world was shaken again. It was not the first time our world has been shaken – Columbine, September 11, Katrina, Red Lake, the growing list of soldiers sacrificing their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan...

Our vocabulary of things that have shaken us has grown again: Virginia Tech is now a place we can point to on a map, and locate in our hearts, and recall that on a Monday morning 33 died, and thousands had their foundation shaken.

God says, *“When the earth quakes and its people live in turmoil, I am the one who keeps its foundations firm.”* [Psalm 75:3] On this New Member Sunday and Confirmation Sunday, on this Sunday when we remember the tragedy at Virginia Tech, I want to share with us about firm foundations.

Evil saddens us, but it does not surprise us. It does not surprise us because Jesus told us about evil in this world. Jesus said there will be wars and rumors of wars. Jesus said there will always be poverty. Jesus said there desecrations will come. Jesus let us know that our foundations will be rocked as we live in this world.

So both the OT and the NT talk about a cornerstone on which life can be built.

- The OT says: *“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.’”* [Isaiah 28:16]
 - The NT says: *“Together, we are God’s house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.”* [Ephesians 2:20]
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Now, the cornerstone is not actually a stone in a corner, but is rather a person in our lives. God in his mercy and grace gave us a person to be our firm foundation.

Jesus is our cornerstone. And the Church Year pictures how Jesus is a cornerstone for us.

1. **The Church Year begins with Advent/Christmas. From this season we learn that Jesus is available.** Jesus came to us.

There were plenty of religious people in Judea when Jesus came. They were in the synagogues and they were at the Temple. They were the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. And they seem to have taken the joy right out of a relationship with God.

When Jesus came you could tell that something was different. People gathered around Jesus in crowds – in great crowds. They gathered on the mount, and on the plain; by the seashore, and in the marketplace.

Why did people gather around Jesus? Bruce Marchiano, an actor who portrays Jesus and has done a lot of research into what he thought the personality of Jesus is like in the Gospels, describes Jesus in this way::

Jesus smiled; Jesus laughed. Jesus was a man of gladness of heart and freedom and openness. He became known throughout Galilee for His genuine strength, the sparkle in His eyes, the spring in His gait, the heartiness in His laugh, the genuineness of His touch; and his JOY! He set hearts afire. He was so different from the solemn religious types He constantly encountered.¹

When we read the Gospels we do not see the somberness of the religious leaders of the time. We see the freedom and the joy of being with Jesus. Being in the presence of this Jesus is part of the firm foundation of life.

2. The Church Year continues with Epiphany. From this season we learn that Jesus is approachable.

Epiphany means to be made known. Jesus became known as someone who had a message that transformed the hearts of people around him.

Billy Graham said: "We're suffering from one fundamental problem in life. Our basic problem is not a race problem. Our basic problem is not a poverty problem. Our basic problem is not a war problem. Our basic problem is a heart problem. We need to get the heart changed, the heart transformed."

This week your heart is going to go through struggles and trials. Your heart is going to be broken or frustrated. How do I know? By listening.

A man has a brother who has cancer. A woman has a granddaughter-in-law who needs a second surgery. A person is losing their job. A parent doesn't quite know what to do about a parenting decision. A person has come to the point where they can no longer live at home alone; they need help.

These are things of the heart. Jesus said about things like these: *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."* [Matthew 11:28]

The cornerstone of your life is the Heart of Jesus. And Jesus is approachable.

This is the Jesus we see all over the Gospels. Is this the Jesus who is your firm foundation? If not, your cornerstone is crooked and cracked. You need to go back to the Jesus who invites you to draw near.

3. The Church Year continues with Lent/Easter. From this season we learn that Jesus is affirming.

There are two meanings for the word "affirm." One is a generic meaning about "saying nice things." That is the wimpy meaning of the word.

I might say, "Nice tie." It makes us feel good for a moment, but in the grand scheme it does not change a whole lot of things for us.

The second meaning of affirm is "to **make** firm." The "af-" in "affirm" stands for making something happen. When Jesus affirms something is going to change, it is going to change – Jesus is going to make it happen.

- When Jesus affirms your sins are forgiven – they are.
- When Jesus affirms you will find heaven's door open – it will be.
- When Jesus affirms he will always be with you – he will be.

Jesus is going to make things happen in our life this week, if we will allow him to. He will affirm us in these four ways::

Forgiving us. Jesus will affirm us this week by taking out the trash in our life.

A four year old was praying the Lord's Prayer. He got to the part about trespasses – which is a difficult word for a four year old. So he prayed what he thought he had been hearing. The little boy prayed: "And forgive us our trash baskets, as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

Every day Jesus takes the trash out of our hearts. That is freeing and healing!

Inspiring us. Jesus will affirm us this week by following up forgiveness with inspiring words. True words of what can be.

Jesus calmed storms, multiplied loaves of bread, walked on water, even helped Peter and the boys with a fishing problem one morning... Jesus affirms us by inspiring us day by day to live, to walk, to risk, to reach, to move, to love, to change, to stay committed – to remain firm. Jesus is inspiring.

Two disciples were walking to Emmaus when Jesus appeared to them. Jesus spent the afternoon and evening with them. Afterwards those disciples said, "*Didn't our hearts burn within us as Jesus talked with us on the road?*" [Luke 24:32] Jesus inspires us.

Relating to us. Jesus will affirm us this week by connecting with us, wherever we are.

- The Bible says, "*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.*" [1 Peter 5:7] Jesus will be with you in your deepest uncertainties.
- The Bible says, "*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!*" [Philippians 4:4] Jesus will be with you in your highest joys.

Jesus will relate to you this week in whatever mood you are in, if you are open to that. He gives us a firm foundation.

Making things new. Jesus will affirm us this week by continuing to give hope. When we experience a week like this one with sudden and random death, hope can seem far away.

When Paul wrote what may have been one of his last letters – Ephesians – and he wrote the letter from a prison in Rome, it could have been a real downer. End of life, end of the road, end of hope, it's over, wrap it up...

But Paul knew Jesus – a firm foundation. So from that prison cell he encouraged people with these words: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.”* [Ephesians 4:4]

No matter the deadends or the roadblocks, there is with Jesus a glorious hope for the future. So I want to remind you that if you are currently facing one of those deadends: the terminal illness of a friend, a divorce, a friend who is moving away, an issue with a child or a parent that is causing everyone pain, a sudden death...

Don't give up. Don't give up. Jesus can make things new down the road. There are no deadends with Jesus in your life. There are, instead, new bridges to build and new roads to walk. The foundation of your life is still firm.

4. The Church Year ends with the Season of Pentecost. From this season we learn that Jesus affects us.

Have you had those experiences when you look at pictures of yourself from 20 or 30 years ago??? When you look at those pictures, you have this profound understanding that the years have had an affect on you.

Have you been back to a high school class reunion two or three decades after your graduation day? You realize that life has not remained the same. Your **old friends** have changed. All those guys who you called by their last names or by nicknames – at class reunions you struggle to remember what their fist names were because you never used first names – they have all changed.

It is not just the years that affect you, or experiences or circumstances or chance that changes you. You are a child of God, and God has promised to make you new.

The Bible says, *“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”* [2 Corinthians 5:17]

When we are open to the Holy Spirit in our life, we are affected by God’s promises and plans. We become a new person.

Take a step back this week and look at what you were like – spiritually – 10 years ago. See how God has been working in your life to make you a new person. Then thank God for what he has done, and admit that there is still a long ways to go!

That is the firm foundation Jesus builds each week in our lives. He is available and approachable. He affirms his promises to us and affects our daily life. As the Psalmist said, *“May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.”* [Psalms 143:10] Amen.

Prayer.

¹ Bruce Marchiano, In the Footsteps of Jesus: