

The Story of Urbaal...

Let me begin this morning's message by telling the story of a man named Urbaal...¹

Urbaal was a farmer living about 2200 B.C. – a little before the time of Abraham. Urbaal worshiped two gods: one a god of death, the other a goddess of fertility.

One day the temple priests told Urbaal to bring his young son to the temple for sacrifice. The priests told Urbaal the only way all of the farmers would have good crops that year was if there was a sacrifice—this year's sacrifice was to be his son.

Urbaal obeys the priests. On the appointed day the boy is sacrificed to the god of death by fire.

Then Urbaal's other god – the goddess of fertility – demands a different kind of sacrifice. The priests announce that one of the men will spend next week in the temple with a new temple prostitute. This sacrifice will also insure a good crop.

Urbaal's wife notices hope written across her husband's face at this news. Her husband's name is called, and he eagerly goes to spend the week with the temple prostitute.

Urbaal's wife walks out of the temple that day saying: "If my husband had different gods, he would have been a different person."²

The Story of Jesus...

Does God have a deep and abiding affect on a person? That is what Urbaal's wife was saying. *"My husband would have been a different person."*

St Paul said, *"If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new!"* [2 Corinthians 5:17 NCV] That certainly sounds like a relationship with God has a deep impact on a person.

Knowing Jesus makes us different people. Our Gospel for today tells that story when a broken woman meets Jesus.

Jesus is looking around on a Sabbath in the synagogue, and he sees a woman. This woman is in bondage to Satan. She has had an illness for 18 years that leaves her bent over and crippled. That would be a miserable, miserable life.

In the Fargo Forum on Monday was an article titled, “What it Takes to Make Youth Happy.” The surprise finding was that 13 – 24 year olds understand that relationships make them happy.

The number 1 relationship mentioned was with parents. The second relationship mentioned was friends. Also in the list was the relationship with God.

I find it interesting that this broken woman is in the synagogue. I think she is looking for a relationship: a deep and abiding and healing relationship.

There is not a lot of difference between this woman in the synagogue and the youth between the ages of 13 and 24. What makes us happy are our relationships. This broken woman finds a relationship with Jesus who heals her.

Jesus heals her... I love the third verse of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” The angels are singing about what Jesus brings. In verse 3 they sing about Jesus bringing “*healing in his wings.*” Sing the third verse with me, will you?

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace! Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn king!

That is the story of Jesus. He comes to form a relationship with us and to heal us. I can almost hear Urbaal’s wife saying, “Oh, that my husband would have known this God! What a different person he would have been!”

The Story of You...

The story of Jesus is also the story of you. Jesus calls you to be like him. Isaiah said we are to be “*the rebuilders of walls and the restorers of homes.*” [Isaiah 58:12]

That is our story. We have been given the gifts. The Bible says that we are equipped for ministry. [Ephesians 4:12] The Bible says, “You will be known as a rebuilders of walls, and a restorer of homes.”

▪ **We are called to rebuild and restore the Core.**

Protective walls important. I want to put a picture up on the screen. That is a picture of my hometown of Rushford, located in SE MN. The picture was taken at the park on the bluff above the city, taken 9 days ago: Friday, August 17. The walls of the dike were intact at that point.

The next picture was taken two days later: last Sunday, August 19. It is the same location, but now the walls were breached. The waters, in less than one hour, covered 2/3 of the city.

The next picture shows my old neighborhood. My Dad’s house is towards the top of the screen.

The Church of my youth in the front left part. They are having church with the Catholics this morning, because of the flood damage to Rushford Lutheran.

My Dad has spent the past week at the Red Cross shelter, waiting for the waters to recede and the infrastructure to be restored so that he can go home.

I know those people. They are “core” people to me. They were my school teachers, the people I sang with in our church choir, the ones who gave me my first jobs, my classmates. They were the ones who knew me as “Klunker” when I was growing up.

I am so grateful God has knit us together to be “rebuilders of walls for one another, and restorers of homes.” So I will be gone after services this morning for a few days. This is my core; my family. And God has equipped me to serve.

You also rebuild walls and restore homes in your core relationships. God has used you, and God will use you again to restore the core relationships in your life.

▪ **We are called to rebuild and restore our Communities.**

Most of you this morning are part of a community known as Pontoppidan Lutheran Church. This is a community of faith and life. Not everyone knows everyone in this community, but we are connected to one another by a common faith expressed in this common place.

I remember hearing when I first became a member of Pontoppidan that this church once had 1100 members. That is nearly twice the size we are now.

As time went on I said to myself, “Why not? Why not again be a church of 1100?” For several years now, through the faithfulness and vision of many, Pontoppidan is growing again.

The growth is often seen in youth activity.

- Tammy told me that we will have more in Sunday School this year than last year.
 - We sent many elementary students to Bible Camp again this year. We sent a larger than expected group to the Black Hills for our Confirmation Trip.
 - We sent a great group of Senior High Youth to Maine to do Mission Work, On the screen is a picture of the group who spent a week in Maine rebuilding walls and restoring homes. They came back excited to have met Christian youth from many denominations from all over the US.
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Jesus was a goal setter. Jesus set a goal for the growing of his kingdom.

- In a parable he spoke of soil producing 30, 60, 100 fold what had been planted.
 - Jesus spoke of the crops being white for the harvest.
 - Jesus spoke of going and making disciples.
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So I want to lay out a Spiritual Challenge for us this morning; a challenge to rebuild walls and restore homes **in this community of faith**. Not walls of brick and mortar but walls of safety for people, walls of homecoming.

If I were to paint a picture of where God is leading this Community of Faith it would be painted with three numbers: 1200 – 600 – 100.

In 10 years – when this Church celebrates 140 years of Ministry – if God blesses us with rebuilding the walls and restoring the homes of this Community of Faith - then numbers at that time will be 1200 – 600 – 100.

▪ **1200 Members.**

That is the number I invite us to pray for who will join us in being a community that calls upon the name of the Lord; a community that cares for one another and grows together and does ministry together. That is 100 more than this Community had years ago.

Pray that God bless us to grow 30, 60, a hundredfold for his kingdom and his glory..

But that number is not sufficient for a healthy church. So a second number...

▪ **600 Weekly Worshipers.**

600 in worship on an average Sunday. The current statistic is that approximately 30% of Lutherans are in worship each week. I believe we should pray for God to raise the bar to 50% by the time we celebrate 140 years.

We want to be faithful to Jesus in following him, and the only way to follow is to be involved in his life and in his place and in his ways. That is regular worship.

But 1200 and 600 is not enough to be a healthy congregation either. So one more number...

▪ **100 % Involvement.**

- 100% involved in ministry...
- 100% involved in discipleship...
- 100% involved in fellowship...
- 100% involved in financial support...

The gift we have in Jesus...

- I had the privilege of being with Linda Hinton and her family as her father went through his last days of life. To be able to trust that Lyle has gone to a better place is such a precious gift.
 - We have been praying for little Ryland, the child born premature who is now closing in on 3 and ½ pounds. What a gift to be able to baptize that child and be able to bring our concerns to Jesus.
 - We have new children coming to Sunday School in two weeks. What a gift to be able to share the Gospel with them and their parents.
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This is why we lay out the spiritual challenge of 1200 – 600 – 100. Because we have been given these precious gifts to share. And Jesus calls us to be *the rebuilders of walls and the restorers of homes*. That is where Jesus is leading us tomorrow, and in the years ahead. Amen.

I invite us to have these goals for Jesus, as we are called to be the rebuilders of walls, and the restorers of homes:

- In our core relationships, to always be there for family and friends in need, and to be bless others as God has blessed us.
- In our community relationship in this church, to be 1200 – 600 – 100 Church:
 - 1200 members
 - 600 in worship
 - 100% involved in the life of the faith.

Let us pray...

¹ James Michener, "The Source"

² Erwin Lutzer, Pastor to Pastor, p. 89.