

Trinity Church in the City of Boston
Year B Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 28, 2024

- [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#)
- [Mark 1:21-28](#)
- [Psalm 111](#)

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

“Home is where the heart is”

Growing up we used to say. “Home is wherever the Army sends you” or “Home is where the household boxes are!” some may see it as cynical, but as my physical structure of home changed every 1-3 years. From this, one learned to be less attached to physical structures and more accustomed to “how then shall we make this space a home- in this place at this time?!”

In our household, we created homes by hanging art immediately on the walls and art was the last to be taken down when we

moved. We found groups to join and church was always there in our midst. Wherever we found ourselves, Sundays found us on our way to a service somewhere.

And Church is where I learned that chewing gum in church was a no no, especially if you were in the balcony and singing and well, someone on the lower level got my gum in their hymnal as I sang with passion on an Easter Hymn.

Church is where choirs always sang (small or large) and where we knew we belonged, somehow, in the midst of all the other unknowns. The church said to us, “How are you, how are you doing, come in and be here with us now.”

My first paying job in the church was in Spartanburg, SC. My first day in the office was actually not in an office but hopping into the front seat of a 15-passenger van with 8 middle schoolers and we were off to somewhere called “Johns’ Island” South Carolina for a week’s mission team of home repair.

“Home” for the week would be on the gym floor for 6 nights with 93 other adults and highschoolers, where my sleeping bag resided

in the midst of my wonderful middle schoolers as we found our way in this new community and “home” for the week.

And there we found ourselves working with a program called HomeWorks. Yep, middle schoolers signing up for something called “HomeWorks” in the midst of the summer with a new youth minister, clearly a HUGE step of faith on their behalf.

HomeWorks is a nonprofit that worked with lower income households to do home repairs that otherwise would be too expensive or unable to be performed. Tasks were painting, mild repairs and mostly exterior home repair work. As a leader I was given a home address, supplies, printed out instructions to get to the home and instructions for our task.

And off we went on our first full day to Mrs Baxter’s home. After 2 wrong turns, we made it (me yearning for my lunch already) and met Mrs. Baxter. A wonderful woman whose home was no longer easily accessible for her because she could no longer use her stairs. The stairs were both in disrepair and her physical needs had changed from when she first moved into her home.

Our task was to build an accessibility ramp for her home.

Yep, me with a liberal arts degree (a minor in Habitat for Humanity Sheet Rock floating), and day 2 on the Youth Ministry job was in charge of building an ADA compliant wheelchair ramp.

The words Rise and Run were perhaps the actions my heart wanted to do when I first learned about this task, but they became the essential key to safety with this project. For those of you in building know that with each inch of Rise, you allow a foot of “run”- or length for the ramp. The house measured 2feet off the ground—this structure was going to have some run.

Building a ramp required a lot of wood, a plan, and a sure foundation.

Foundationally, there was trust from Mrs Baxter that we not only going to care for her home, we were going to improve it.

There was trust that we would do this project one step at a time and that we would do no harm.

The First day was spent measuring, destroying (middle schoolers LOVE this), and digging holes (Post hole diggers were the vocab word for the day.) and realizing we did not have quikcrete for pouring our foundations of our posts for the structure.

Delays.

Each morning we began with prayer together. Much like Anne Lamott who says prayer can be from “Help, Thanks, and Wow” our prayers ranged from “From thank you for the sunshine” to “Lord have mercy” and “Give us patience- I didn’t see that coming”

Each morning we all learned something new, and something unexpected definitely happened.

And in the midst of all of the unknowns there was love.

On day three or four thousand of the week, in the midst of a low country rain shower and temps in the high90s, I found myself totally defeated. We did not have the right tool for the next step. The tool required was 45minutes away and we had to stop for the day, way to early for my liking.

Our lead program manager called on our walkie talkies and said, “Checking in on Abi” and I replied, “Yes, Hank” (dreading having to report in and say that our day was done early because I still hadn’t learned how to say fascia correctly) and he replied with the warmest, “How are you doing?”--- rather than “Report in and tell me your progress”- he was doing a heart check.

In his 30+ years of construction work, he knew that a task is just a task.... How your heart is working in that midst is far more important to the work you are doing. And I said, “Hank- it’s a hard day” and we moved from there... he helped us trouble shoot the rest of the day and reminded us that while the ramp was important, Mrs Baxter was far more important- use the time to build relationships and then head back into our “home” for the day.

We finished the ramp by the end of the week. I am pretty sure none of those middle schoolers had built a ramp either before that week, not sure they have built one since either, and yet they worked with what they had, dug down deep from their inner being and the knowledge of love in their heart to build something a bit bigger than the ramp (which was remarkably huge.)

They were invited into a home that was different than their own home, they were part of a community that was strangers on day 1 and by day 7 relied on each other as a team. We might have thought we were not the “right” people at the time, but we figured our roles out as a team and asked for lifelines as needed. Everyone found their spots from “who will make sure the water is in the

van” to “Who will count noses each time we get into the van” to “Who is our resource for quikcrete.”

We dug into our beings and we tried our best to always act in love. And when we failed, we got up and started again as a community.

In our reading from the Letter to the Corinthians, we hear about food (my personal favorite topic of the bible!) knowledge and love. The writer is speaking to behaviors around food customs. The community in Corinth is figuring out how to live in their community as followers of Jesus. The advice given is to “live out of love for one another.” Live examples of faithful, persistent love that was given to you by God, through the life and teachings of Jesus. Let that love be your outward practice.

“Knowing things” is marvelous and wonderful and even helpful, but it is relationships and love that are most important. Preaching the good news in the practices you maintain matter, so live with building relationships first. Meet people where their heart is, first. Your behavior should model this for those around you.

I think it is fair to say that you will learn something new and most likely unexpected each and every day, you will need to call a life line, not matter how wicked smaht you might be, AND you just

might be that life line for someone else- a reminder: respond in love first.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus speaks and acts in one of my favorite Greek words evah. “ekousia”-

Ek- out of
and “ousia”-being.

He speaks and teaches from his inner most being. His “authority” or ekousia is both knowing God, not from book study BUT because he embodies who God is- fully human (remember Jesus needs naps, prayers, has a sense of humor, compassion, and even loses his patience) and fully divine (the power to heal, the knowledge of who God is.)

Jesus speaks and heals from his heart space, his true nature: love. The words he speaks in the gospel reading in the synagogue are familiar but heard in a new way because the reading is being understood in a new way, through the lens and voice of God’s love- Jesus himself. Jesus speaks openly and even the demons understand this fully and obey. His words fill people with awe and wonder and re-establishes relationship.

In the church, we are always building up things, metaphorically and literally. Church is space for finding a spiritual home. As Kit shared in her sermon 2 weeks ago, church is a space for you to belong and be fully you. As Morgan shared last week, it's a space to struggle with faith and love. The church is a space where you can learn not only the practical of the consequences of chewing gum while singing but also the gift of God's love, mercy, and grace and where your distinct gifts and talents are called together.

For the past 8 months as I have preached and celebrated, I have looked out at a pile of dirt slowly moving about in Copley Square. There is a plan out there for what that square will look like eventually and I am definitely not the one called to move that dirt around. I am praying for them though and watching as we will partake in the end product. The work is dusty, dirty, inconvenient and we want to rush through it...but they have to get the foundations right for the final product.

Here inside the walls and systems of Trinity, we too have been building community in so many ways within the ministries of the church. We are building framework so that you might be able to find your spiritual home and ministries. The work of creating Trinity's Ministry Council has been a very intentional process so

that the foundations of the council are able to foster accessibility for all at Trinity to find their spiritual home and ways to engage faith and action.

Howard Thurman said, “Ultimately there is only one place of refuge on this planet for any person- that is in another person’s heart.”ⁱ In building Christian community we strive to live out a place of the heart. Speaking from the heart, inviting others in, and remembering that we as a community are part of one larger body, the body of Christ.

Love builds up.

Love endures through hardship, challenges, and longer than we hoped.

Love invites, teaches, and heals.

Love is the common ground that makes a household flourish.

I wonder where in this new year, you will find your space in this household and where you might most come alive, where love is speaking to you, too.

Unpack and settle in, breathe in and out-

Have patience and continue to love.

ⁱ <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/5769/for-the-inward-journey#:~:text=Thurman%20wrote%2C%20%22Ultimately%20there%20is,remains%20one%20of%20profound%20importance.>