

# THE SURE FOUNDATION

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*1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11, 16-23*  
*LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH*  
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I recently had an interesting conversation about foundations. Many of you are familiar with Donna Entz who has a ministry with Muslims in North Edmonton through MCC Alberta and Mennonite Church Alberta.

Recently Donna put me in touch with a young Muslim woman who she had befriended in Edmonton and had recently moved to Lethbridge to take a new job down here.

This woman had been involved in refugee advocacy in Edmonton and was very interested in Mennonites and the work we had done with Syrian refugees.

So, we agreed to have coffee. I was delighted to get to know a passionate, highly educated, articulate woman, who was eager to take on any and all injustices in the world.

Our conversation ranged from politics to community activism to religion to identity to how we in Canada might learn to live better together as people with genuine differences.

I asked her if she was familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. She wasn't, so I told it to her.

I said that from a Christian perspective, this serves as a good model for how we are to relate to those who aren't like us. A Samaritan occupied the most hated category for

Jesus' Jewish listeners. And yet Jesus turned him into the hero of the story, and through him showed us that those who claim to love God must love all their neighbours (whatever their creed or colour) as themselves.

These are the kinds of stories that motivated our refugee response, I said. This is the approach that at our *best* we as Mennonites try to take in the world.

She told me she was very impressed with Mennonites, that they were so progressive, that it was a kind of Christianity that must really work well with the causes that we were both interested in.

(I told her that before she got too impressed, I should probably tell her a few other stories 😊).

But then I told her that while I was proud to have been formed in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition, and while I was happy to align with others in common pursuit of justice and compassion, before anything else, I considered myself a Christian.

Christianity wasn't something that I found pragmatically useful, it wasn't something that gave me some justification for the causes I happened to be for or against. It wasn't a tool in my activism toolbox.

It represented the core of who I am and aspire to be (that last part is important, because sometimes I get it wrong!).

This surprised her.

Her Muslim faith did not function in the same way for her. She considered herself a Muslim, yes, but it didn't form the bedrock of her worldview. It seemed to function more like an ethnic category—like the fact that she was born in Pakistan—than it did as a personally chosen conviction and the basis for everything about who she was and wanted to be.

If her Muslim beliefs were useful in the causes she supported, great. If not, well, she would ignore them or try to reinterpret them.

It was not at the core of who she understood herself to be; it did not form the foundation of what she believed and how she lived. It was one factor among many others that she took into consideration as she made her way in the world.

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I don't tell this story to make myself look good. As I said, my statement about the centrality of my Christian convictions was and will ever remain more an aspiration than a realized reality!

I tell it because it reminded me that foundations come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.

There are many rivals for the title of "foundation" in our lives, aren't there?

- Our own competencies (we become the foundation of our lives)
  - o professional abilities
  - o fitness mania, looking a certain way
  - o denial of death
- Political ideologies/causes
  - o activism of my new Muslim friend probably functioned in this way
- Relationships
  - o our spouses, our kids, our friendships
  - o when our lives are defined by those around us, lose people, we don't know who we are any more
- Hedonism
  - o pursuit of pleasure, avoidance of pain
  - o path of least resistance
- Other religious traditions
  - o each one has a sense of what a good life looks like and how it ought to be built
  - o Buddhism, for example—wisdom and compassion, and the gradual letting go of attachments to the world that cause suffering

The point is this: *Nobody lives a foundation-free life.*

Every person and every group of people builds on something, *whether they are aware of it or not.*

The question is: What are we building on?

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This is the issue that Paul wants the church in Corinth to understand. The Corinthians were, as we know by now, a rather confused bunch.

They were divided into factions; they were failing to grasp the extent to which allegiance to Jesus required that everything in their lives be reoriented according to God's "foolish wisdom."

To these people, Paul says:

*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.*

What does it mean to say that Christ alone is our foundation?

Well, the simple answer is that it means that our lives are rooted in and built on the person and work and teaching of Jesus.

The longer answer would involve at least three components. Our lives are grounded in:

**What Jesus does *for* us.**

- Cross (Atonement)
- Empty tomb (Defeat of death, evil, the powers that enslave us)
- Future return (New creation, justice, God setting the world to rights)
- Doctrinal content of orthodox Christianity
- Salvation—in this world and the next (future hope)
- All of these things are what God accomplished in Jesus—things that we could never do for ourselves

**What Jesus does *in* us.**

- our lives are made to be reflections of Jesus
- our life's work, through the guiding, correction, and inspiration of the indwelling Holy Spirit is to become conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)
- Christ's teachings become at home in us
- We come to look at the *world* differently (power, for example)
- We come to look at *others* differently
  - o we tend to valorize those with

- Money
- Status
- Beauty
- Power
- Education/Intelligence
- Athleticism
- Youth
- If you don't believe me, look at pretty much anything in the media
- Jesus trains us to see people differently; to attach value differently; to prioritize the lowly, the weak, the foolish because these are precisely the things that Jesus prioritized
- We look at *ourselves* differently
  - combination of sinner and saint
  - loved, forgiven, recipients of mercy... and entrusted with the task of loving, forgiving, and showing mercy to those around us

**What Jesus does *through* us.**

- blessing the world
- making disciples
- embodying and proclaiming the kingdom
- being salt and light

These three things are what it means for Christ to be the sure foundation of our lives.

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I want to close by returning to my conversation with my new Muslim friend a few weeks ago.

As our conversation drew to a close, we were talking about the need to learn how to live together with difference and about the resources that our respective traditions offered toward this end. We talked about how our traditions both have much to repent of historically, how Christians and Muslims have behaved badly at times, etc.

But then she said something I didn't expect: "Yeah, but you Christians are so lucky to have Jesus at the origin of your faith. You can always go back to him."

Yes, we can. And we should. And we must.

There is no other foundation like him. There is no other foundation upon which to build a life on that simultaneously costs so much, and yet is so freely offered; no other foundation that asks that we give up our very selves only to receive them back and so much more besides; no other foundation that sets us free to love fearlessly and generously, knowing that God loved us and loves us more deeply and truly than we can imagine.

There is no other foundation like Jesus. He is the one upon which we build our faith, our lives, and the church.

May we never lose sight of this. And may our lives reflect our devotion to him and our commitment to build well.

Amen.

