

Series: Doctor's Notes
Title: Planted Jesus, Planted Church (Motif of geography)
Trinity Presbyterian Church
September 19, 2021

Note: Some of the ideas around place and “Godspeed” were formed through this beautiful documentary, which I recommend watching on your own: <https://vimeo.com/200206468>

The world I grew up in is quite different from the world I live in today. I remember my dad saying often to his five kids, “Only 10% of the world’s population are farmers. Are we ever blessed.” Dad was someone who decided to write his name in the land, a phrase flatlanders use, meaning they’ve planted themselves in one place and live from sunrise to sunset with the rhythms and pace of the earth.

And for the five kids Dad and Mum had, it was a good place for us to grow up in. The baldheaded prairie of Alberta has an expansive hominess to it, a sense of belonging and becoming. And, Alberta’s little farming villages are just as homey, too. We grew up 15 miles from Foremost, named because it was the foremost point of the railway. That name alone should tell you that we were pretty isolated. I remember the common joke of living in Foremost being that you could watch your dog run away for three days. Only 500 people lived in Foremost, and if somebody died, 500 people came to the funeral. In fact, if the death was unexpected or for a particularly young person, 1000 people would cram into our community hall.

My life was pretty simple, pretty small, pretty grounded. Not better or worse than kids who grew up in the city, but certainly different. And then when I was 19, my life took a turn. My sisters and I moved to Chicago for three years, and since that time, I’ve lived in many places, without really having the opportunity to lay down roots. I guess the reasons have been good: I’ve pursued adventure, education, a career . . .

but now that my partner and I are considering marriage, we're keen to put some roots down.

Even though my life will never be the same as it was when I was a flatlander and a carefree child of a fourth generation farmer, I still feel an inseparable tie to moving at the pace of a farmer and living the lifestyle of a farmer. The pace of a farmer is slow and the place of a farmer is planted. It's a good place to live from, even if I find myself living in a city or pursuing a career that is very good and requires more of me than a farm girl.

I think this longing and this sense of home that I feel when I think of my childhood is tied to the life of Jesus, too. So, we're walking through Luke together, noticing themes or motifs that Luke uses to weave a tapestry, to tell his story. He uses a particular pallet to paint his canvas. He chooses certain motifs and keys to write his symphony. He has certain characters and places to write his novel. And today we come to his motif of geography, which is why I titled the sermon *Planted Jesus, Planted Church*. The simplest way to see this in action is to just read Luke and Acts, and do what we tried to last week: to put ourselves into the lives of the first century people. When you do this, it's my hunch that you're going to notice two things about Luke's motif of geography, and there these:

- 1) The pace of Jesus's ministry
- 2) The place of Jesus' ministry

Pace and place. Two things that really define what it means to be human, I think. Let's start with Pace.

Pace

When you read about Jesus' journeying in Luke, what is it that you notice? Does he travel around like Joel Olsteen on a private \$86,000,000 jet? Nope. He's got some sandals that probably cost less than a day's wage. That's Jesus' travelling gear. And does he travel around at 500mph

like Joel Olsteen? Nope, Jesus walks everywhere he goes and so I guess you could say that the God of the universe travels at the speed of 3mph.

Most humans have lived at the pace of walking, it's only been in the last 100 years that our perception of travel has changed, and our expectation of travel, too. Our times aren't bad or wrong, but they sure are different. So, let me be clear about something before we get further: I'm not about to suggest that we need to wish ourselves into a time capsule where we can go back in time, because I trust that God has planted us right here in the 21st century for the very reason that he wants us to be Jesus here. But surely if we want to imitate Christ, we've gotta be game for imagining how he lived and then reimagining how to live as he did in our world today. And so, dear friends, let me suggest to you from the plain reading of Luke, where Jesus meanders between tiny little villages of about 300 people with people who knew him, his cousins, his aunts and uncles, and the people who lived in the house three generations before him . . . let me suggest to you that Jesus doesn't move at a hurried or rushed pace.

Friends, we need to slow down to catch up to God. We need to slow down to catch up to God. Let's see how this plays out in Luke...

First of all, Jesus is baptised in Luke 3 by his cousin, John. As John baptizes his cousin, he's declaring to their little local community that this simple carpenter is the one who will save the world. Next, Jesus goes into the wilderness to prepare for his ministry. He goes to a deserted place to be alone with his Father, a place where he could walk and walk and walk as he talks to his Father about life, calling, and the future. Jesus also overcomes the temptations of the devil in that wilderness, and coming out of the wilderness, he begins his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus doesn't sail on a ship to a faraway land. He begins his ministry right in his hometown where people know his father, his cousins, his grandparents. And the stories go from there with Jesus going to villages that are all within a very small radius. He goes to Cappaernaum, Nain, and other little villages within the region of Galilee. Every once in a while, Jesus will get in a boat to cross the sea of Galilee, but all of the rest of his travel is at the speed of walking.

There's an old phrase called Godspeed, we say it to people as a well wish on travels. Luke shows us that, according to Jesus, Godspeed may just be at three miles an hour. Jesus changes the world by walking three miles an hour. Maybe we need to slow down to catch up to God.

I've often wondered about Jesus' imagination and longing for all the other parts of the world in his day -- what was he thinking about the people living in North & South America, Australia, China? As God, he could have miraculously gone to those places during his life on earth, but he chose to live among us by living at the same pace as us. And Jesus turned the world upside down by moving at the speed of walking.

There's a theologian from the 20th century who wrote a book called *The Three Mile a Day God* and in it he talks about this very notion of moving at the pace of God. Koyama writes:

“Love has its speed. . . . It is an inner speed . . . a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. . . . It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks.” - Kosuke Koyama

The pace of Jesus is a pace worth following. Maybe we don't need to run around like “chickens with our heads cut off.” Sorry, that's a colourful world picture from my farming childhood. Maybe the world can be changed at the speed of walking.

What happens next? Jesus' disciples carry on, walking as they change the world. The first disciples to witness Jesus' transformation walk with him on the road to Emmaus . . . Oh my! Have you walked with Jesus, friends? It's an exercise highly recommended! Get out in creation and simply enjoy the goodness of God, talking to him as a friend, as you walk.

Those disciples carry on the business of the kingdom with walking -- and they turn the world upside down. You can read Acts to see how this spreads out.

So, I don't know if you've picked up on this, but Godspeed, the speed of walking three miles per hour, guides us in peace, gives rest to our souls, and also changes the world. Isn't it funny how the simplest things can have the greatest impact? Maybe Jeremiah the prophet knew it too when he said,

“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16

Place

So, walking is the pace of Jesus' ministry, and we've already gotten a clear sense of place, too, with his ministry almost entirely happening in Galilee. But, does Luke tell us more about Jesus' sense of place? Where did all of these roads lead to, for Jesus, in Luke's storytelling? We've seen that Jesus centres his ministry in the northern region of Galilee, but down in the southern region of Judea is the city of Jerusalem -- the place to which Jesus' ministry became propelled.

No doubt, for Luke, Jerusalem is a key place in his storytelling. Luke is so interested in this particular place that he will speak of Jerusalem 92 times in Luke and Acts. 92 times! From the research on motifs I've done, that is the most voluminous motif in all of Luke's writing. What's going on here? Why Jerusalem?

In the Gospel part of the story, everything tends *toward* Jerusalem. The infancy account reaches its climax when Jesus is presented in the temple in Jerusalem. The story of the boy Jesus in the temple returns him to Jerusalem to be “about my father's business” (2:49). Only in Luke's version of the transfiguration does Jesus talk with Moses and Elijah about “the exodus he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (9:31).

Most of all, Luke makes the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem a major element of his story. After Jesus resolutely sets his face to Jerusalem in chapter 9, over the next ten chapters, Luke reminds his readers multiple times that Jesus is “on his way,” specifically to Jerusalem. Jesus declares that it “is impossible that a prophet should die outside of Jerusalem” (13:33), and when he arrives at the city, he mourns over it because “you did not recognize the time of your visitation” (19:44).

Like the other Gospel writers, Luke locates Jesus’ final teaching ministry in Jerusalem, as well as his passion, death, and burial. Unlike the other Gospel writers, though, Luke focuses his resurrection stories around events that happen just outside of Jerusalem, as opposed to Galilee. In short, Luke structures the Gospel so that everything stays in the symbolic heart of the Jewish people--Jerusalem. After his resurrection, Jesus promises the outpouring of the Spirit, which happens in Jerusalem. Jerusalem becomes the birth of the church; its first expansion; and its suffering of persecution at the hands of the Jewish leaders. So for Luke, the place of Jerusalem is the central home for Jesus and the early church. But, does Luke make it stay that way? At the end of Luke, Jesus declares that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preaching in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). And then, right at the beginning of Acts, we read the pivotal declaration by Jesus to the church when he says,

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:9) In Acts, Jerusalem becomes the hub of the early church.

Luke writes how the first mission of the disciples to Samaria is confirmed by John and Peter from Jerusalem (8:14); Saul returns to the city after his call, only to be sent out again (9:23-30); the baptism of the household of Cornelius is defended before the leadership in Jerusalem (11:1-18); the church in Jerusalem sends Barnabus to confirm the mission to the Gentiles in Antioch (11:19-24); Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is debated and then confirmed by the apostolic council in Jerusalem (15:1-35); Paul journeys to Jerusalem and confers with James (21:15-26) before Paul is arrested and ends his ministry finally in Rome. So, even as

Luke moves the good news to other nations and other peoples, Luke keeps reminding the reader of the city of Jerusalem and its place at the center of his story. This geographical centering is important to Luke, but why? Why Jerusalem?

Well, first of all, to fulfill the promise of God from long ago to his people. Luke will portray Jesus as the true prophet who visits Israel, and how Jesus as prophet undergoes the inevitable fate of true prophets in Jerusalem as he is despised and rejected. For Luke, it is the poor and lowly who receive the prophet, but the leaders and religious elite reject him. That is why, when Jesus arrives at Jerusalem, he pronounces woe over it for not recognizing the time of its visitation (19:44). Luke shows us that Israel rejects her first visitation, but what about the second? Luke will describe the raising of Jesus from the dead and the disciples who bear witness to the resurrection through signs and wonders in his name to be the “second visitation” or the second chance for Israel to repent. And Luke shows all of this happening in Jerusalem.

Luke shows that the offer still stands for Israel, but that the Gospel is going to go forth, out of Jerusalem, and to the farthest parts of the earth. The promise of the blessing to Abraham swings wide open for us today . . . so much so that the apostle Paul will recognize that it is no longer the temple or the city of Jerusalem that are the center, the home base, of the church. In 1 Cor. 3:16 Paul will declare that “you yourselves are God’s temple and God’s Spirit dwells in you.” The place of God’s glory has moved out of the symbolic city of Jerusalem and into the hearts of God’s people today – and all of this was accomplished by disciples who followed Jesus at a walking pace.

Where does this leave us today?

While we may long and love to go to Jerusalem to see where Jesus walked, a place in Israel is no longer the destination of our pilgrimage and no longer the place of God’s particular dwelling. Rather, out of the blessed people, Israel, God has poured out his salvation for all.

So today, our Jerusalem is, if you will, our community of faith as we together become God’s temple, the place where God’s glory dwells. And for us today, the mode of spreading the Gospel hasn’t really changed, for

as we become planted in our communities, walking at the pace of God, we bring God's glory to our particular villages, towns, neighborhoods, and streets.

Sure, podcasts, travelling evangelists, live streamed services, digital marketing of the Gospel, and all of those 21st century things can and are being redeemed by God . . . but take heart, Christian. God has planted you in a particular place and he has given you the gift of knowing and being known by that place as you bring God's glory to that place . . . all at Godspeed, at the speed of walking.

And what is the end of all these things? Well, I know we're in Luke for this month, but indulge me by coming with me to the writings of John who wrote down the revelation of Jesus Christ. Because, at the end of the story, it's the New Jerusalem that comes down to earth out of heaven. You see, at the end of all things, we will be planted in a glorious city. John writes in Revelation 21:10-11, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God..." Later in that chapter John writes, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there."

At the end, or perhaps the beginning of all things, heaven comes down to earth and we are planted in a place where we will live and walk and talk with Jesus forever and ever. We will come to this place and perhaps "know it for the first time" as the poet T.S. Eliot writes, and we will truly know that there is no place like home. But for today, heaven has already come down to earth in Jesus and now through Jesus by the Spirit at work in you . . . so go ahead, get planted and go about the business of bringing heaven down to earth, one step at a time.

Benediction

Children of God

Called into a place in God's family

Remember that it is the Spirit who walks with you, day by day, in your particular place, giving you the grace to bring the life and presence of Christ in your world.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)