

## *Rocks and Sand*

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 6:46** "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"<sup>47</sup> I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.<sup>48</sup> That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.<sup>49</sup> But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

## *Rocks and Sand*

Today's text is such a simple story. There was a song we sang in Sunday School at the age of six or seven that told the story of these four verses. What more can be said? Now, if you have an engineering background, or if you've done construction work, or if you're an enthusiastic do-it-yourselfer, then the foundation metaphor can invoke sharp memories. I immediately thought of slab foundations on the coastal clay soils in Houston and how, soon or later, every one of them cracks and then expensive concrete piling must be installed. I thought of basements in Missouri that required blasting out rock to make a hole for the basement. And I thought of a damp, low crawlspace in Wallburg. You probably have mental images of foundations that come to your mind.

Both Matthew and Luke tell this story, although in slightly different ways. Matthew (7:24-27) tells of building on rock or on sand; Luke talks about digging down to rock, or not having a foundation. Matthew tells about a storm and wind and rising water; Luke talks about a river that floods and bursts against the house. You might picture an arid valley that suddenly becomes a raging river in a flash flood.

There's an old gospel song that many of us have sung. "The Solid Rock" is the title, but you may recall it by the opening words, "My hope is built on nothing less." It's in our hymnal as number 379 and it's based on the Matthew text of this story. This old gospel hymn sings of hope, of trusting in Jesus' Name; it proclaims the reliable grace of Christ, and proclaims his redeeming work that justifies us.

It's been said that most people get a lot of their theology from the hymns they sing. If their religious life consists of going to Sunday morning worship, singing the hymns and sleeping through the sermon, that is almost undoubtedly true. So, someone's experience with this story of foundations and houses - and their understanding of the story - may be based on a childhood Sunday School song and singing "My hope is built on nothing less." Fine! As far as it goes. Here is what I've learned this week that I am called to proclaim this morning. First, this story in Luke and Matthew isn't really about construction technique. The point isn't about how to build solid houses or sturdy church buildings. Building is the metaphor, not the point. Second, the childhood song and the gospel hymn contain truth, valuable truth - but neither one gets to the **point** of the story. If our understanding of this teaching of Jesus is based on these songs, we've missed the whole point that Jesus is teaching us here.

What is the point that Jesus is making? He says, "I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them." Three things: comes to Jesus, hears Jesus words, acts on that teaching. The childhood song and the old gospel song deal in their own way with coming to Jesus and hearing his words, as they repeat some of the words and images from scripture. But there they stop. They never get to the point that Jesus is making about acting on his teaching. This passage of scripture begins with a question, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?" In the old gospel hymn we sing that we "wholly trust in Jesus' Name." But here Jesus asks why we call him Lord, but do not do what he tells us.

The story in both Matthew and Luke is tale about contrast, not between those who seek Jesus and those who ignore him, not the contrast between those who believe and those who don't believe, not the contrast between those who read their Bible and those who don't; no, it's about the contrast between those who act, those who do, and those who do not.

This is not to negate any other part of the process. It doesn't ignore the earlier stages of the journey of faith. One must seek. One must listen. One must hear. One must believe. One must understand. One must trust. But one must also act. Actually, we need to be doing all of these things all of the time. We need to always be seeking more knowledge, more understanding, an ever deeper relationship with Christ. But the point that Jesus is concerned with here is the relationship between knowing and doing. He speaks of "One who hears and **does not act**." We must learn Jesus' teachings - but then we must move from learning as simply intellectual or emotional achievement, to being so grounded in Jesus, so infused and saturated in his teaching, that our learning comes alive in our actions.

Thought and action must be coherent. They must be aligned with each other. They must be synchronized. When they aren't, we say, "I'm sorry, but your actions speak louder than words." When we say one thing and act in another, people notice. And they conclude that we don't fully believe or mean what we say. But when our actions match our words, not only do others hear and see a strong message, it also reinforces and strengthens our belief. Our belief guides our actions - our actions reinforce our belief.

We cannot change from being a slowly dying and shrinking congregation if we do not turn our face to the future and think in terms of being a new church start. We have to remove some of the clutter from the past in our minds to make room for visions and dreams of the future. But thought and action must be in synch. We cannot say that we are focused on the future, that we have cleared room in our hearts and minds to concentrate on renewing this congregation, if we are unwilling to get rid of the physical debris of the past that clogs our storage areas. That which clutters our building with physical leftovers and unusable debris is a clear physical indicator of what clutters our minds as well. Flotsam in the closet is linked to jetsam in the brain. Both mentally and physically, we need to make travel arrangements to journey into our future as a renewed, a revitalized congregation - a new church.

There's something else that can get overlooked in this story of rocks and sand. Jesus says that we will all have floods and storms in our lives. He doesn't say, if you build on a sure foundation there won't be any flood. If you hear and act: there will be trouble in your life. If you hear and do not act: there will be trouble in your life. Simply believing that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is God's anointed one, that he is Christ, that he is Messiah - will not suffice. It won't anchor you in times of trouble. If you think that salvation comes simply from proclaiming that you think that Jesus is the Son of God, then when troubles strike, you're liable to have that belief shaken and rattled and perhaps destroyed. "I believe in Jesus. How can this be happening to me?" We don't choose whether we will face severe storms in life; we only get to choose the foundation on which we will stand.

So let's talk about the foundation on which we can build our lives. Paul wrote to the folks in Corinth that, "no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." Jesus is the foundation. Jesus lived what he taught. Jesus walked the path of life that came to be known as The Way. It's popular to ask, What would Jesus do? Before we do that, we should ask, "What did Jesus do?"

He wasn't part of the power structure of the day. He didn't rise to high position in the government or the temple hierarchy. He didn't seek to use the traditional social or political power structures to impose belief or behavior. That's very different from the way that we've usually sought to bring about change all through history.

But, he wasn't anti-organized religion. He taught in the towns and on the hillsides. He taught in synagogues and in the temple - and he spent a lot of time teaching. He must have thought that it was important for us to learn. Learning the teaching of Christ is not a thing that you ever finish. You don't graduate from this school. You aren't finished when you've memorized the books of the Bible and twenty handy verses of scripture. You aren't through when you know all of the familiar Bible stories about Noah, Abraham, David and Bathsheba, Daniel in the lion's den, Joseph and Mary and the three wise men, Jesus on the cross and Jesus resurrected, and Peter preaching on Pentecost. You don't graduate because you may have read the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. So, what do we do? We study! We find new lessons in old familiar stories such as the one today about houses and foundations. We continue to learn through adult Sunday School, Bible study in women's circles, daily devotional reading, thinking about Sunday's sermon, reading books that open up the text of scripture in ways that we haven't

considered before. Don't just study alone. What you overlook, another may see. What you find, may be the pearl that another person needs.

What did Jesus do? He ate with anybody and everybody. (**Luke 7:34**) He said, "the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" So, what shall we do? We eat with each other. We have covered dish dinners like today and fellowship dinners on Saturday nights. It isn't about eating - well, it isn't just about eating. It's about visiting and getting to know each other, and being community, and being brothers and sisters - being family. But Jesus didn't just eat with his disciples. He ate with bad people and good people, with rich people and poor people, in the city and out in the country on a hillside. You might say he was an equal opportunity diner! How can we follow Jesus on this path? We can help serve a meal of grace at Cooperative Community Ministry. You could call the Shepherd's Inn and take food there and sit down and eat and visit with the men who live there. It's about food, yes, but so much more. God gave us one mouth and two ears, which might be an indication that we should listen more than we talk. Listen to the men at Shepherd's Inn. You can show more love by listening than by talking - and you can learn a lot from people who are weathering the storms of life. Part of eating with everybody is making sure that everybody can eat. Put food in the red wagon in the hallway. Do like Earl and Pam Hackman - put a grocery bag with non-perishable food in it in your car. You never know when you'll run across someone who's hungry.

What did Jesus do as he walked The Way of life? He prayed. He praised God. He prayed about what was on his mind. He prayed for strength and guidance and wisdom. He stayed connected with the divine by being in conversation with God. What shall we do? Pray when we're happy. Pray when we're sad. Pray when we're troubled and hurting. And remember to pray with thanksgiving and gratitude when we aren't troubled. Pray with praise and thanks for all of the beauty that surrounds us. Pray for strength to relieve the ugliness that lies all about. Pray for wisdom. Pray to be useful.

What did Jesus do? He was constantly doing acts of mercy and compassion. Jesus didn't perform magic tricks to get attention. He didn't do spectacular circus tricks to impress people. No great feats of strength and power. No levitation, bolts of lightning, destruction of evildoers, or celestial displays. But he healed the blind and the lame and the sick, fed the hungry, and put people back in their right minds. How can we be merciful and compassionate? Perhaps it's by delivering meals to shut-ins. A simple phone call that says I've been thinking of you. A ride to the doctor or to the grocery store. Mentoring a child at school. The opportunities are everywhere. All we have to do is stop our own frantic busy-ness and open our eyes to those around us.

Hear Jesus' words and act on them. Study and learn. Feed, eat, and listen. Pray about everything. Look for opportunities to show mercy and compassion. Put your actions and your belief into alignment - and you will have a firm foundation for weathering the storms of life. Amen.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Matthew 7:24-27** "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell-- and great was its fall!"

<sup>NRS</sup> **James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 11:28** But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"

<sup>NRS</sup> **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.

Refrain

On Christ the solid Rock I stand,  
All other ground is sinking sand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to hide His face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale,  
My anchor holds within the veil.

Refrain

His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
Support me in the whelming flood.  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my Hope and Stay.

Refrain

When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh may I then in Him be found.  
Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Refrain