

Parable of the Two Foundations
Luke 6: 47-49 and Matthew 7: 24-27
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June 25, 2017

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

In the two scriptures for today, Matthew and Luke record one of Jesus' parables about two builders. One builds a house on a firm foundation and the other builds a house on sand without a firm foundation. When the storms come, the house on the firm foundation remains and the one built without a firm foundation collapses. Jesus chose this parable based on a good understanding. Jesus was a carpenter and he knew what he was talking about. In Palestine, during the summer some of the rivers would dry up, leaving a sandy bottom. But in the winter the heavy rains would come, flooding the sandy river bottoms. A wise builder would take these facts into consideration in selecting a building site.

This parable reminded me of the home my parents and I lived in on the east hill of Kent. It was a Dutch colonial with two stories. It was a nice home with solid doors, good cabinetry and all around nice features. Over the years we did notice small changes and my parents attributed them to the ageing process of a home. The upstairs doors would stick, some of the tiles in the kitchen pulled away from the wall and windows no longer closed evenly. We also had some cracks show up in the sidewalk. My parents noticed these things but did not connect the changes to any single cause. It was as if our house was calling to us, but we did not get the message. After my parents passed away, I was making preparations to sell the house. During an inspection, it was discovered that the house's foundation was sinking! Apparently one of the drain pipes that took water away from the house out to the drain field had broken and water was eroding the soil under the house, causing the foundation to settle. To fix the problem, the house had to be jacked up, the leak under the house fixed, and then reset the house on a new firm foundation. I had not looked up the house in years, but looked it up recently. It has survived quite well, had been painted and remodeled and is currently for sale.

In the case of my parents' house, none of us had the understanding to take actions sooner. However, in today's Scriptures, Jesus makes clear foundational advice for us. In the Luke passage, there are three words that stand out as foundational advice from Jesus: **Come** to me, **hear** my words and **act** upon them. As in the above story, the house called to us, we did not hear what it was saying at first, but once we identified the cause and took action to fix the problem, the house was again on firm ground. Thinking about this, we can apply the same advice to ourselves related to maintaining and/or developing the strength of our Christian faith. So let's look at each of these pieces of advice and see how they apply to us individually and collectively.

The first step in this process is to **come** to Jesus. We cannot find Jesus if we do not look for him. Once we look, Jesus comes to us. He shows himself in Bible stories, in our music, and in our running conversations with Him as we go about our days. Central to finding Jesus is to become familiar with His story in Scripture. We can be thankful that the Gospel writers took the care to record Jesus' life story and his teachings.

Another source for finding Jesus can be found in our Book of Order. In the Book of Order is a list of the great aims of the church, its mission. Two of these aims that apply to this process of coming to know Jesus are the proclamation of the Gospel and the maintenance of divine worship.

Cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit is another way to come to know Jesus. Jesus knew he was to be leaving and wanted his disciples to carry on without him. In Acts we read this Scripture: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere - in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. - Acts 1:8 NLT* And in John 16 "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you. ... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. To summarize, coming to Jesus is one of the building blocks of a secure foundation. The ingredients that make up this building block are the Word, worship and the Holy Spirit.

The second building block is to **hear** the word. We have to not only read the Word, but attentively listen to what it says. One of the pitfalls for us is to listen, but not really take the message in. I think it becomes dangerously easy to come to church, listen to the readings and the sermon, but do it almost like automatic pilot. This can be particularly true if we have heard many of these lessons over and over again because we have been coming to church for many years. Take today's Scripture for example. I have heard this example many times, just as many of you have. Yet it was not until I slowed down and read them carefully that I saw what I had previously missed. There are three short commands right in the first part of Luke's retelling of the parable. "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who **comes** to me, **hears** my words, and **acts** on them. Again, I go back to the story about my parents' house. Metaphorically, the house was telling us that something was drastically wrong, but none of us could see what was happening and link the clues together. Jesus is saying the same thing. How can you acknowledge me as Lord and still not do what I tell you to do? Each time you read the Scriptures or hear them preached, put on a new set of ears and ask yourself, is there a new slant or new view that I have not uncovered before? It may be that your particular circumstances in life may heighten your awareness of some message there that is just what you need. It may be the irony of life that the very hardships of a given week or time in our lives will give us new perspectives and we find God in them because of hearing the Scripture from a different perspective.

The final building block in this firm foundation is to be **doers** of the word; to act upon what we have read and heard. Returning to the great ends of the church, there are two that pertain to action. The church is to provide for the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the individual believers. We are also to take responsibility for promotion of social righteousness. Jesus provided for the nurture of the disciples by spending time with them. He did not send them off without teaching them what the kingdom of God looks like. He also provided them a role model for caring for the poor, the ill, the spiritually depleted and the strangers. He understood the power of seeing God's rule as it affected the people. Take for example, the feeding of the five thousand. He knew that you could not learn from him unless your bodily needs were also met. So he fed the people. He taught by example and showed compassion for us in our everyday circumstances, be it illness, disability, grief or persecution. He was also there in life's celebrations.

So we have the best quality building blocks for life. Jesus, His word and example and the capacity to act accordingly. Remember that in the parable the house that was built on the rock withstood the storms. When we have faith in God we have strength to withstand life's harder times. We do not choose whether we will face severe storms in life; that is inevitable. But we do get to choose the foundation on which we stand. I do not wish to make this sound like a Pollyanna solution. After all, we do come close to collapsing under the weight of problems from time to time. But, we are part of a community that understands the foundation. And as doers of God's will, we can be the support for one another when we need it. I return once again to the great ends of the church. We can be the shelter, nurture and spiritual supports for each other, just as Christ does for us.

As you build your spiritual house, remember Christ's words: come, listen and act.