

Rock Solid
June 18, 2017
Graduation Sunday and Father's Day
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. 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. 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. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

I have always loved this parable. It is, in essence, the story of the three pigs. The three pigs have to build a home that will survive the huffing and puffing of the big bad wolf. In Jesus' parable, the house has to withstand the storms of life. Jesus' parable focuses less on building materials and more on the foundation of one's life. In other words, what values comprise the foundation of your life?

When I graduated from college I didn't head straight to seminary. I can't seem to take a straight path to anywhere. Anyway, I graduated in December and the day after Christmas I got on a plane with a duffle bag and headed to Crested Butte, Colorado to cook at a Christian Ski Lodge. A friend from college got me the job. He worked as an engineer on the mountain where they were building the Grand Lodge Hotel. It didn't take long to make friends. I met Al and Laura at church. Al also worked on the construction site of the Grand Lodge hotel. He measured blow counts as they drove pile into the mountain. It was basically a giant hammer pounding steel into the ground as part of the foundation of the hotel. All summer long and into the fall they drove pile and worked on the foundation. I kept asking my friends when they were going to build something. They both assured me the foundation was the most important part and worthy of the time and investment to do it right. Otherwise, the hotel would be at risk of sliding down the mountain. I checked on the internet and the Grand Lodge is still open for business.

Working on one's foundation can be like pile driving – slow, tedious, and far from glamorous. It's not something you throw together so you can get on with the important things in life. It is an investment of time and energy that can make the difference between devastation and endurance.

The one who builds on rock, says Jesus, is the one who listens to Jesus' words and acts on them. If you look at all the red in many Bibles you see that Jesus said a lot of stuff – all important. You would do well just to read the red words in the Bible. However, this passage comes at the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and in this sermon Jesus spells out foundational teachings as one who embodies God in the world. Each one is worthy of multiple sermons. Each teaching is challenging and counter-cultural. Each teaching is the driven pile of a rock-solid foundation.

Here they are:

1. Blessed: In what is called “The Beatitudes,” Jesus calls for a new way of understanding blessedness. The people the temple and haters called “cursed,” were the ones Jesus called blessed. All people matter. All people are beloved.
2. Jesus told us to let our lights shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to God. Our calling is to be a light in the darkness, revealing God and God’s love as our life’s work.
3. Follow the commandments. Yes, all ten. If you take time to learn them you quickly realize how each one functions to create a just community. Jesus understood the wisdom of the commandments and summarized them with “Love God, Love neighbor.”
4. Do what you can to be reconciled with those who have something against you.
5. Even though most people think “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” Jesus said, “Turn the other cheek and go the second mile.”
6. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
7. Don’t be all haughty with your religion. Humbly love and serve as Jesus loved and served.
8. Pray. Pray, hallowed be God’s name. Pray God’s kingdom come on earth as it is heaven. Pray for your daily bread. Pray for the forgiveness of debts. Forgive the debts of others. Pray that you stand strong when tempted. Pray for a spirit of forgiveness.
9. It isn’t about you. If you boast about how faithful you are – you are doing it wrong.
10. Don’t become a slave to material things.
11. Don’t worry, trust God for the day.
12. Don’t judge.
13. Ask, seek, knock...pursue the things of God with passion.
14. “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”
15. Discern the spirit of a person by the fruit he or she bears – not by words alone.

These 15 teachings are in Matthew 5-7. The rest of the gospel illustrates them. These are the pillars of a rock-solid foundation, along with a few other things we learn from Jesus. These are reflective of who we are as followers of Jesus. These are our values, our foundation.

We can no longer assume that people know any of these. We are bombarded daily with messages that tell us we need more and that we have plenty of reasons to worry. We read the tragic stories of people taking their lives or falling into a pit of despair because they don’t know they are beloved and blessed by God. We see people who identify as Christian, perpetuating acts of violence and hatred. We see individuals, communities, and nations stuck in cycles of retaliatory violence. We see individuals and corporations lusting for more profit with no regard for those who labor and the land that gives its resources. We see houses built on sand that may look strong but lack a strong foundation. The big bad wolf is always lurking.

Earlier in the chapter, before Jesus tells this story, he says, ¹³“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Jesus is no fool. He knows that what he is teaching is hard. He knows it is much easier to forget all this love your neighbor stuff and just think about yourself and your own happiness. He knows that people think this is old school and boring. He knows people don’t care.

But he also knows that these things are the keys to the kingdom – to life abundant for all people.

How's your foundation?

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”