

# GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sunday, May 29, 2005  
Second Sunday after Pentecost (A) (Proper 4)

Deuteronomy 11: 18-21, 26-28  
Romans 1:16-17; 3:22-28, [29-31]  
Matthew 7:21-29

## **BUILDING HOUSES**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Both the wise and foolish men in the story Jesus tells do exactly the same thing. They build houses. The two houses certainly could have looked the same. It is neither the builders work nor their houses that make the difference; it is the house foundations-what cannot normally be seen-that makes one house builder wise and the other house builder foolish. I do not know all that much about building houses but I would imagine that attaching a house to a rock foundation would be much more difficult than setting a house on a foundation of sand.

There are no promises that a life of discipleship will be easy. In fact, there are many challenges in following the way of Jesus Christ. We do not always like to hear those words, but they are indeed true. On the one hand, salvation is very easy. Salvation comes as a gift by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. We know that salvation is not dependent upon anything we do. However, responding to God's gift of grace by living the disciplined life can be extremely difficult and challenging. In fact, it is impossible, especially if we try to live up to the words of Jesus in the entire Sermon on the Mount of which our gospel reading is the conclusion. The life that Jesus talks about in these closing verses from the Sermon on the Mount comes from inside of us. It comes as a gift from God. Even though our outward actions may appear good, kind, and caring, sometimes our actions do not reflect our inner attitudes, which are not always positive toward others. When that happens, we are like the foolish house builder who builds his good-looking house on a foundation of sand. That house could not withstand the rain, the floods, and the storms that came. The wise and the foolish men experience the same problems: rain, floods, and winds. However, the effects of those challenges were quite different. The wise man expected challenges to come and prepared for them with a lot of hard work to build his house on a solid-rock foundation.

What is a "solid-rock" foundation? The word "petra" or "rock" appears in three other verses in Matthew's Gospel. 16:18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 27:51: At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 27:60: and laid it in his own tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Common in all three verses is that God is more powerful than rocks. It was not his efforts that produced confession; the confession came as a gift from the Father in heaven. God can split rocks and a rock tomb cannot keep God from raising Jesus out of the tomb.

Working at and taking time to connect to God is what gives us a solid foundation. Congregations are called to provide whatever it takes to make those experiences happen for people so they can stand up against the destructive rains, floods, and winds that we all face at sometime in our life. After completing the Sermon on the Mount and telling the story of the two men who build houses, the Bible says the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes.

Where did the Scribes derive their authority? It was from their knowledge of the Scriptures. However, knowing the right stuff (even the right stuff from the Bible as important as that is) still is not the way through the narrow gate into the kingdom of heaven. This truth is what Jesus seeks to make clear to those who will listen. As key as Biblical knowledge is the real key is being in relationship with God through the understanding of Scripture. For us, that always means trusting God's grace and Promise in Christ Jesus. When one is grounded in the firm foundation of God's grace this solid-rock foundation will never crumble as it is daily made known by the power of the Spirit. One could even be a Bible whiz and still not totally trust God for salvation. In fact, as Bible whizzes we might have more trouble trusting God than our own knowledge of what the Word of God says about Christ Jesus. The Pharisees are superb in obeying the law, but their own obedience was more important to them than the power of God. Those who know Jesus as Lord and do mighty acts in his name, may trust the own abilities rather than God. Living that way is like building your house on a foundation of sand. It will not last.

One way to think about doing the will of God is to think about what we do-especially looking at the all the good, obedient and religious stuff. This is the foolish way of building a foundation. The other way trusts what God is doing, knowing us, loving us, filling us, so that we are good people who bear good fruit, from something deep inside us, being a solid rock foundation that keep us secure in the midst of the storms of life. This is the wise way of living and building our lives.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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