

August 2 2020 – “Solid Ground”

Message: “Solid Ground”

This illustration that Jesus uses
– of the two builders and their houses –
it’s just a perfect teaching story, simple and easy to grasp.

I love using it for a children’s message:
a bucket of sand to sink your fingers into and shove around,
a nice smooth rock to knock on and feel the weight of.
It’s such a wonderful way to show the difference
between the shifting and movement of sand
and the sturdy reliability of rock.

Every kid – young and old – knows that sand washes away;
how many of us made sand castles on the beach,
and watched the waves and wind erase them
like they were never there?
But rocks are different;
rocks stay where they’re put, mostly.

Many years ago, while hiking along a river in Algonquin provincial park,
there was this shallow stretch in the river
where hikers had taken to building little inukshuks,
those Inuit stone markers.
There were dozens of them, standing in the river,
the water flowing around them.
They didn’t even wobble;
they probably lasted all summer long
and into the autumn.

Sand shifts and changes all the time; but rocks stand.

But this story, this illustration, that Jesus uses...
...it’s all about the foundation, not the building material.
There are two houses, built by two builders.
Presumably, each house is as good, as homey, as the other;
at least, there’s no mention of the houses
being differently built or differently appreciated
by their builders.
The key difference, maybe the only difference,
is that one house was built on a foundation of rock
and the other, on a foundation of sand.
The solid, reliable foundation of rock is Jesus,

and the sand...
 ...well, we don't know what that is,
 but it wasn't solid enough
 to support the foolish man's house
 – his life –
 when the rain and the flood and the wind came.

Jesus' illustration takes the sting of worry
 out of the first part of what we read together this morning,
 the part about "not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord'
 will enter the Kingdom of heaven."
 If we believe in Jesus, if we're saved by Him from sin,
 if we listen to Him...
 ...we should be okay, now and eternally.
 We'll have built our house, our lives,
 on solid ground,
 and we can be confident that we're right with God.
 Add on a deck,
 set up a couple of comfy chairs
 and open up a big umbrella...
 ...we're good to ride out the storm.

But there's this uncomfortable pair of words
 that Jesus uses in his illustration, in v.24;
 words that we can't safely ignore.
 Two simple verbs, action words,
 that might put a crack in our foundation,
 if we're not careful.

Jesus says, "anyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them."
 Hears and acts.
 It's not hears and believes,
 or hears and appreciates,
 or even hears and talks about it to others.
 It's hears...
 ...and acts.

Whatever Jesus has been saying, prior to what we read together today,
 he wants more than polite, agreeable listeners.
 Believing in Jesus, following Jesus,
 is more than simply acknowledging that Jesus is Lord;
 it's more than the awakening of faith in Him.
 That's how we experience salvation,
 how we get "in."

But once we are “in,” now what?
 Do we just keep hearing and believing?
 Or is there more?

Jesus says that not everyone who says that he is Lord
 will end up “in” the kingdom of God.
 Like the wise builder, only those who hear
 and then act
 on what they’ve heard
 will be citizens of the kingdom.

For those of you familiar with other parts of the New Testament,
 this is going to sound a lot like “faith without works is dead.”
 For Jesus, it’s the way in which our lives are lived out
 that demonstrates whether or not
 we are truly one of his followers.

Belief shapes action;
 if we want to know what we believe,
 what word we’ve heard,
 we need to take a look at how we live and act,
 every day.
 We can’t sit this storm out,
 safe in our comfy chairs.

So what Word have we heard, and what are we meant to do?

This powerful illustration of the two builders and their two foundations
 falls at the very end of the Sermon on the Mount.
 If you’ve been following along with our daily devotional series,
 you’ve just spent a month
 reading and reflecting on that sermon,
 verse by verse.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus unpacks
 the good news of the kingdom of God
 and how to live it out,
 day by day.

It’s wide-ranging, covering how to pray,

how to give,
 how to invest for the present and the future,
 and how not to worry.
 Jesus teaches how to act in
 some of the most painful and difficult situations,
 dealing with anger,
 the breakdown of intimate relationships,
 justice and injustice,
 worship and forgiveness
 and hypocrisy.
 And at the very beginning of this great teaching,
 in what we call the Beatitudes,
 Jesus describes what's true about our lives
 – poverty, grief, conflict,
 the need for mercy and justice –
 and he answers those truths
 with the hope and blessing
 offered in the kingdom of God.

The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount,
 everything Jesus teaches in Scripture...
 ...that's the foundation of rock for our houses,
 the substructure upon which we must build our lives...
 ...if we're to truly follow him.
 And it's always a good idea to assess our foundation
 before the rain starts falling and the flood rushes in
 and the winds begin to blow.

So let's take another look at those two builders
 and the foundations upon which they chose to build.
 It's still a perfect teaching story, simple and easy to understand:
 two people,
 two responses to hearing Jesus.

The builder that Jesus says is wise heard
 what Jesus said and acted on it;
 the foolish builder...didn't.
 One house, one life,
 stood sturdy on solid ground
 through the rain and the floods and the wind...
 ...and the other fell.

The message is clear:
following Jesus, building our lives on Jesus,
means knowing AND living
the Good News of the kingdom of God,
every day and in each moment of our days.

Believing in God, loving God
and being dedicated, devoted to God...
...part of that is living a kingdom-life that honours God.

Or to put it another way, in more modern terms:
each country, each society all around the world today
has a unique way of living;
a unique way of approaching problems,
different laws and customs,
different attitudes and values.

Following Jesus is like becoming a citizen of his society,
emigrating to his country,
and being willing to live
according to the values and beliefs
of that new society.

We hear the Word,
what Jesus teaches,
and we act on it.
We become part of a new people,
the people of God.
And the lives we build within that society,
within the kingdom,
grounded on the solid foundation of Jesus,
provide strength
not only in the present to withstand all the storms
that come our way,
but also in the final great storm
that sees through
to the new heaven and new earth
of our eternity with God.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.