

"Faith -Built on a Solid Foundation!"

Matthew 7:24-27
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Luke 8:11-15, Romans 8:1-8
St. James UCC

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What sort of foundation is your faith built upon? Jesus poses that question for each of us with His story about a house that is built upon rock versus one that is built upon sand. Jesus wasn't just offering wise advice for building contractors, rather, He meant to speak to each of us as we reflect upon our lives and the foundation upon which they are built. Is it solid? Will it withstand the storms that life inevitably holds? How good is our foundation?

Our text from the gospel of Luke comes at those same questions in a little different way. This passage follows the parable of the sower and is an attempt to explain that parable and the metaphors that it contains. As you recall, in that parable a sower sows seed and it falls in a variety of places, some of which are much more conducive to growth than others.

Some seed falls on rocky ground and that is explained as those who hear the Word with joy and respond enthusiastically, but only for a while. Their faith has no depth, no enduring strength. In the parable the seeds on rocky ground sprout and grow quickly, but then wither in the heat of the sun. In this explanation, because they have no depth of root, these are the ones who fall away in times of testing. In other words, their faith is fine and full of enthusiasm as long as everything in life is easy and going well, but when the tough times come, their faith isn't up to it. It's like the house built upon sand, and washes away in the storms of life. When you really need it, it doesn't stand up.

Years ago, National Public Radio had a piece that focused on the beginning of commercial jet service. This is a portion of that piece.

It was in 1958 that America's first commercial jet air service began with the flight of the Boeing 707. A month after that first flight, a traveler on a piston-engine, propeller-driven DC-6 airliner struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. The passenger happened to be a Boeing engineer. The traveler asked the engineer about the new jet aircraft, whereupon the engineer began speaking at length about the extensive testing Boeing had done on the jet engine before bringing it into commercial service. He recounted Boeing's experience with engines, from the B-17 to the B-52.

When his traveling companion asked him if he himself had yet flown on the new 707 jet airliner, the engineer replied, "I think I'll wait until it's been in service awhile."

His faith had pretty shallow roots. When you stop to think about it, what does our faith really mean, if we aren't willing to put our lives where our mouths are?

Then our passage from Luke talks about the seeds that fell among the thorns. In the parable the thorns grew up quickly and choked the good plants. Here it says, “they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature”.

We live in a world and a society where there is much that competes for our attention. There are many priorities that we have to choose from. Where will we spend our time? How will we use our energy and other resources? Amidst the myriad of voices calling out to us, some people never fully hear - or at least heed - the call of God’s Spirit. Instead of placing a priority on following God’s will, they follow what seems the path of pleasure or riches or fame. Their faith is literally choked by these competing priorities, and it never has the chance to mature and grow strong. They never are able to look beyond their own desires to get a glimpse of something that is bigger than they are. All that they really have is themselves. They live for the moment, and when the moment passes, they have nothing at all.

Then there are some seeds that fall on good soil, as our text says, “these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” These are the ones who build upon a foundation of rock. When the storms in life come, their faith stand secure and sees them through even the most difficult of times, for it truly provides a solid foundation for their lives.

Paul talks about this whole issue of faith using a slightly different image. He uses the image of the Spirit versus the flesh. The Spirit of course is God’s presence with us, a presence which calls us, guides us, and would lead us on the path of faith. When we listen to the Spirit we follow the path which leads to life and peace. It’s not always an easy path. God doesn’t give us life the way that we want it, but rather gives us everything that we truly need, and then is there with us each and every step of the way.

In opposition to the Spirit is the flesh. That is the path of what feels good. We seek pleasure or profit, or whatever it is that feels good to us right now. It’s a path that has no lasting value, for it is the path of living for the moment, and the pleasure of the moment is all that it has to offer. When the moment ends, there is nothing. As Paul says, “to set the mind on the flesh is death”.

Not only does this path lead to death, but when death comes it has nothing to offer, it is a path that is empty indeed, for as the old saying goes, “you can’t take it with you”. If all that life is about is what feels good to me or what I can accumulate, if all I do is live for what I want here and now, it’s a life lived without any lasting meaning or value. When a job is a lost, health problems arise or a loved one dies, there is nothing here to give comfort or support or guidance. This is a path that lives for the moment, and when the moment passes, there is nothing else there.

Faith, on the other hand, leads us to focus on the Spirit. It is the path of listening to our Creator, of following God’s will and intentions for us, of living as we were created to live, as we were intended to live. When we live lives of faith, God gives those lives meaning and value that is lasting for all of eternity. When we live in faith, our lives take our meaning and purpose that is much bigger than you or I or what is happening to us right now. When life’s storms blow strong and hard it is our faith that will sustain us.

How strong is your faith? What kind of foundation does it provide for your life?

That's an important question for each of us. Each year we give Bibles to our fourth graders. These are a gift of faith in which we have said: "God will speak to You through this book. Read and listen carefully." We worship, we pray, we say the right words, but do we really put our lives where our mouths are or do we just say the words? That is the challenge for each of us, for it is only when we live our faith, that it will provide the solid foundation for our lives that we really need.

It is only when we live our faith, that our lives find meaning and purpose that is true and lasting, for it is only in faith that we are becoming that person that we were created to be.

Amen.