

Informal moments

- Bibles and Brews will be meeting this Thursday at Buffalo Ridge Brewing at 6:30pm. We will be sharing in a study through RightNow Media, so if you want to join in the conversation please let me know so that I can share the study with you, but even if you aren't able to view the study before hand you would be welcome to come and join us.
- We are serving breakfast at the Banquet on February 23rd! If you would like to participate, simply contact our office and we'll keep you informed as we get closer. We have another date coming up in and March as well, if you are interested.
- Dakotas Camping is set to resume this summer, and registration is open! Simply go online to the Dakotas camping website for more information.

Song*The Church's One Foundation*

UMH 545

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

- Coronavirus around the world
 - Doctors and nurses, as well as support staff such as cooks, janitors, housekeeping, delivery of vaccine

- Those in our Church and families fighting cancer, addiction, depression, and other illnesses.

- Cecile Binkerd passed away last week. Per her final wishes, there will not be a formal service, but the family is holding an informal gathering, open to the public, next Saturday at 1pm at Dennis Binkerd's shop on the corner of 1st and Western here in town

- Continued prayers for the family of Warren Johnson, who passed away last week.

- Our nation, as our newly elected officials assume their roles, and seek to build unity among our nation.

- Protests are now happening in Russia, over the arrest of Alexei Navalny, a longtime critic and opponent of President Putin. So far over 3000 protesters have been arrested. As citizens in the United States, we understand the importance of free speech and a free democracy, and so I invite you to pray for those in Russia who seek to exercise such freedoms.

- Two weeks ago, a group of Chinese miners were trapped; this morning, 11 of them were rescued. There are 10 more unaccounted for at this stage.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 7:24-27 (NRSV)

“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!”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Song*My Lighthouse*

Sermon

Once again, good morning, friends! Today we are continuing our series on the parables of Jesus. Stories were perhaps Jesus' favorite means of teaching, and so there is something for us to learn from the various parables and short stories that Jesus shared. Last week we looked at the parable of the sower, and how we need to be mindful of what sort of soil we may be resting on... Mindful of how the word of God may be taking root in our lives. Today, we continue with a very similar theme in the parable of the builders. As we look into this story, will you please pray with me once more? O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each and every one of our hearts be holy and pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The parable we are exploring today is probably one of the most well-known of Jesus' parables. Many of us may have even learned it as children through a very catchy song... "The wise man built his house upon the rock." It's a cute song, very catchy, and it conveys the general story quite well. Taken at face value, it's a simple enough parable to understand. But as we learned last week, these parables need to be explored in a more intentional way, or else the story will remain just a story, and nothing more. For the teaching of Jesus to truly affect us, we must understand the full depth and meaning of the lesson we are meant to learn through these parables.

One of the ways we can do that is by looking into the context of where this parable is told. In the case of this particular parable, it concludes the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon is largely considered to be Jesus' greatest teaching. It contains all of his greatest hits, including do not judge others; do to others as you would have them do to you; store up treasures in heaven; love your enemies. This sermon also includes the "Beatitudes", a series of statements that emphasize the importance of being

peacemakers, to be humble, and to be pure in heart. This sermon even includes the Lord's Prayer, which we share each week. Virtually everything we know of what Jesus taught us to do is located right here in the Sermon on the Mount. And this parable of two people building houses concludes the entire thing.

As I said before, it's a simple parable. One person does the hard work of digging deep into the ground, to find a solid ground upon which to lay the foundation of his home. In a time where there were no jackhammers, no diesel-powered construction equipment, or much of anything beyond a simple shovel, this is a lot of work. But the investment of time, patience, and effort proves to be worthwhile. The house that is built is solid, and can withstand the punishment of strong winds and rising waters.

The foolish person, on the other hand, just finds a spot that looks good on the surface. They don't put in the effort of digging down through the sand to find a solid base. They build a home that appears to be just as sturdy as the others man's home, but underneath there is no firm foundation. And when the strong winds blow and the flood waters rise, "The house on the sand went splat."

The point Jesus is trying to teach us in this story is that listening to his lessons is like building a house. In hearing and accepting the lessons of Jesus, we are able to build our faith. But even in that, we have a choice. We can hear the words of Jesus, and then go about our lives as normal. But Jesus warns us that this would be like the foolish builder. We may have a house in the end, we have our faith... We know the lesson and stories of Jesus, but it does not change our behavior. We may attend worship, do the "Christian" thing on Sundays, but outside of those usual obligations, nothing about our life seems to change. And when tragedy strikes, our faith and our very lives threaten to

come apart at the seams. Without the firm foundation, without the investment in strengthening our faith, we are tossed about by whatever disaster eventually comes our way. Maybe it's losing a family member, or a beloved pet. Maybe it is a major health concern, or troubles at work or school, or a strained relationship. All of these are significant challenges, and without a strong faith to support us it is easy to get swept away and give into despair.

Instead, we should try to be like the wise builder. Jesus tells us the wise builder is one who hears Jesus' words, and then *acts on them*. That's the key difference between them. This person takes the time to dig deep into the soil of their lives and faith, making the changes they need in order to live as Jesus lived. The house is built, and it is firmly rooted so that *when* those tragedies strike, the house can remain standing. All the hard work, the classes, the prayers, the studies, the questions... It's a lot of work, and may involve some major changes to how we live our lives, but *when* things get bad there is a firm foundation of faith that will help us keep our heads above the water. That faith is one that gives us hope, and reassures us that God is with us no matter what.

And perhaps the hardest part to this whole thing is that this is a lifelong process, or at least it should be. None of us are ever too old to keep learning, to keep discovering how we can best hear Jesus' words, and apply them to our lives. After all, every house needs remodeling from time to time. But don't be discouraged! Just take it day by day, making whatever changes you can, however small, and slowly but surely you'll begin to see progress. And especially if you have family with you in this journey, take time to work on building your faith together. Help and support one another, read Scripture

together and talk through what you read. Take time to work on this *now*, before the flood waters get so high that you cannot continue.

And you may be thinking, “this sounds a lot like the point pastor was trying to make last week.” And you’re right... It is essentially the same message, just a different story. But that’s just how important a task this truly is for us as Christians. If we aren’t taking that time and effort to truly apply the lessons of Jesus’ to our lives, if we aren’t pulling out the rocks and the weeds, or digging through the sand to find a solid rock, we aren’t going to have anything truly worthwhile as far as our faith is concerned. As soon as we assume our foundation is solid, or that we are taking root in fertile soil, than we’ve missed the point of everything Jesus came to teach us. We cannot take this lightly. In the case of the builders, it meant the difference between life and death. We must hear the word of God, and respond to it faithfully... Or else our faith is meaningless and worthless.

So please, take the time to read the lessons of Jesus. Start with the Sermon on the Mount... It’s just two chapters long; you can read it very quickly and easily, but I would encourage you to read it slowly, deliberately, and carefully. Try to take to heart exactly what Jesus wants us to do... Relearn what it means for us to be makers of peace, to be the light of the world, to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek, to pray to our God in heaven, to avoid passing judgement on others, to seek the narrow gate that leads to life, and to bear good fruit in our lives. In this way, we will establish a firm foundation; one that can help us to withstand all the tragedies of this life, and to serve as a shelter for others in their own storms. In this way, God’s Church will continue to stand firm, upheld by God’s righteous, omnipotent hand. Let’s pray.

Song

How Firm a Foundation

UMH 529

***Benediction**