

“The One Solid Foundation”

Today we're in the third week in our series on discipleship, laying out in these six weeks some of what has been happening over the past few years (as we've begun laying a foundation) for where we're going, as well as inviting and challenging each of us to grow in our discipleship-walk with Christ.

As we've been saying throughout, this talk about discipleship isn't anything new for us. It's not a new direction. It's not a new idea. It's certainly not a new program or class or study we're taking on. It's been part of who we are and what we've been about from the time this congregation first started more than 50 years ago.

What is new, and this is where the change that's happening (is happening) is the emphasis we're giving it and the priority it now has (and will continue to have) as we move forward (together) in our response to what God has done for us in his Son.

We're taking Jesus at his Word that if we commit ourselves to making disciples, he will take care of building the Church. If we focus on following (and helping others) to follow, then what will follow is that the church will grow.

For the next two weeks (in this series), today and next Sunday, we're going to be dealing with the disciplines of the Christian life, with those habits or patterns or commitments we make (in our lives) that enable our lives to become what God intends for them to be. Being a disciple requires discipline. It doesn't happen without a daily commitment to doing the very things God has called us to do.

It's like anything else in life. If I want to be an athlete, play on a team, I need to commit to regularly practicing the fundamentals. If I want to excel as a musician, it takes more than sitting down at a piano (every now and then) and trying to figure it out. It's not going to happen. You need to develop the disciplines that support it.

It's the same thing in the Christian life. The Christian life is a disciplined life. It's a life of getting up each day, “putting on” as the apostle Paul talks about, the clothing of Christ, and committing to developing the habits or the patterns that lead to (and that produce) God-honoring fruit.

What we're going after (and this is where this naturally leads) is to develop a culture, build a community, in which each of our lives (and our life together) bears that kind of fruit. That's what we're going after. That's what we're working to create. That's what Jesus wants. Let's turn to our text.

Today's story, from Matthew chapter seven, is one (for many of us) that is familiar. It comes at the end of what we know as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It's one of the great teaching sections in the gospels. It's one of those places where Matthew (in this case) as the gospel-writer, (for three chapters) gives us some of Jesus' most condensed and direct and important teaching.

Go home today and read through chapters five, six, and seven. They are filled with teachings from our Lord; lessons for life that will change your life. They invite. They challenge. They mold and shape.

Bottom line: You simply cannot read through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, listen to his teaching, and be the same. You can't. It's not possible. What Jesus teaches is so contrary to what we hear (and see) every day (in our world), there's no way you can take it in and come out on the other side the same. Follower of Jesus or not, it'll change your life. It has to.

Unless, and this is what the story is all about, unless you take it in, hear what Jesus says, and do nothing. If you do nothing, it'll do nothing. If you take it in and never live it out, it'll never be lived out, and nothing will change. But if you hear it and you do it, then it will. If you take it in and commit to living it out, (and this how discipleship works), then not only will your life change, but you'll also find yourself (as it changes) in a closer relationship (and walk) with Christ.

Remember the story? Jesus says, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rains came and the winds blew...yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rains came and the winds blew...and the

house fell with a loud crash, because its foundation was not built to withstand the storms that inevitably come at us in life.”

Now, let’s stop for a moment and unpack a bit of what we just heard, because what we just heard (what Jesus said) is filled with lessons for life. There’s a lot going on here. Jesus’ teachings are like that. They’re simple stories, easy to follow, but there’s a lot in them.

Let’s start with the foundation. That’s a good place to start. The foundation is the first thing that needs to be put into place. If you’re going to build a house, the first thing you build is the foundation.

When we built homes in Mexico (this past summer), before we arrived, the people (on the other side) had laid a foundation. When this sanctuary was built, the first thing that happened was that a foundation was poured.

That’s where it starts. Every building needs a foundation. Every house (being built) needs something upon which to stand. The stronger the foundation, the stronger the house; the more secure the footing (underneath), the more secure the structure (being built) upon it will be.

In the story, both the wise man and the foolish man build a house. (I hope you noticed that.) It’s a simple detail, but it’s important: both the wise man and the foolish man build a house. Even more important is the implication. You don’t have to be wise to build a house. (You don’t have to be wise.) It’s not only the wise (in this life) who build houses. Everyone (in this life) builds a house.

It’s not just believers who build houses. It’s not just Christians who construct a place to live. It’s not only people of faith. Everyone builds a house. Everyone constructs a life. You don’t have to be wise (in life) to construct a life. Everyone constructs a life.

What makes the difference is the foundation. What makes a person wise (or foolish) is where he or she decides to build. If you build on a foundation that is solid, your life will last. If you build on anything (less solid), it won’t.

In fact, I don’t know if you noticed or not, but Jesus says nothing (in this story) about the house itself, nothing about the life being constructed, except for its connection to the foundation, except for the foundation upon which that life (being constructed) is built. He doesn’t talk about the walls of the house. He simply assumes that every house has walls. He doesn’t talk about the windows or the doors. It’s a given that every house will have windows and doors. He doesn’t talk about the rooms, about the bedrooms or the bathrooms or where the family’s going to hang out. All he talks about is the foundation. All he’s concerned about (at least in this story) is how strong and secure that (upon which) the house being built is being built.

That’s the question. It’s not hard to follow. It’s a simple story. There’s only one question Jesus asks, only one answer he’s asking us to give, and it’s simple. Where are you building your house? How solid is the foundation upon which you are building your life?

Figure out the answer to that question (Jesus says) and you’ve figured out life. Figure out what is solid and secure (what’s going to last) and what isn’t (and what doesn’t), and there’s not much else (from this story) you need to know.

You tell me. How many people build their lives on things that are not going to last? How many lives are being constructed without a solid foundation to withstand the storms?

There are a lot of “sandy” foundations in this world, lives being built on things that ultimately will crumble and fall. Where are you building your house? Upon what (and upon whom) are you constructing your life? That’s what Jesus is asking.

Take what Jesus says and do it. Take what Jesus teaches (and what you’ve learned) and live it out. If you do (Jesus says), you are wise. If you don’t (our Lord tells us), you’re a fool.

Now, back to the original question, to where this all started. We’re talking about foundations, about where (and how) we are to build. We’re talking about building houses, how Jesus calls us to construct a life. What’s the foundation he is talking about? Upon what are you and I (in this story) called to build?

Don’t miss the point. Is the foundation for a solid and secure life how we live? Is what we’re called to build upon (and construct our lives) the goodness and good works of what we do? Take it and do it? Hear it and live it out? Is that the foundation? Is that the rock upon which our lives will last?

No, it’s not. (Don’t miss the point.) The foundation is Jesus. That upon which you and I are called to build (that which will last) are the words and the promises (and the teachings) of Christ.

The one who hears these words of mine (Jesus says) and puts them into practice is the one who is wise. The one who takes what comes from me and (from that) constructs a life, that's the person whose foundation is secure.

In other words, living a good life (without Jesus) is not a solid foundation. Doing what's right and what's good in this life (apart from Christ) is ultimately a house built by a fool. But if that good life is built upon Jesus, (and his word) it'll last. If doing what's right and what's good is in response to what God has done (for us) in his Son (on the cross and in the empty tomb), then it's a house (and a life) built by someone who is wise.

Don't turn this around and make it into something it's not. Don't come at the disciplines of the Christian life as if they are what are going to get you into the kingdom. They're not. (Going to church, reading your Bible, spending time in prayer); developing the disciplines Jesus wants? (That's not what saves us.) Jesus saves us. Learning to follow (and live) as he has called us (to follow and live) is not what gets us into heaven. Our only hope for heaven is Jesus. Your only hope for salvation is the person and work of Christ.

Don't confuse the two. (They're not even close to being the same.) At the same time, don't miss the point. Everyone builds a house. Everyone constructs a life. A house that lasts is one that is built upon Jesus. A life that continues on (and is productive) is one that's built (and constructed) upon Christ.

And that leads to the disciplines Jesus wants. That leads to the habits and patterns we're called to develop that enable us to build the house. "Whoever hears these words of mine and does them" (Jesus says). Whoever takes what they have heard and lives it out (our Lord tells us), that's the person who is wise.

Spend time with God's Word. That's where you'll hear his voice. Make time to talk with him in prayer. That's how you'll come to know what to do.

In this transition we're making from being a program-driven church to becoming a disciple-producing body, this distinction is crucial. Don't make it harder than it has to be.

People have asked, "If we're trying to be disciples, what's the next step? If we're trying to become a community of believers who follow Christ, how does it all happen? What are we supposed to do?"

It's not that hard. It's simple. Discipleship happens as we each take seriously our calling to follow Jesus. What we're supposed to do is to (listen and respond) to what our Lord is telling us. The next step is to develop the disciplines, in your own life, that lead to a well-constructed house, built upon a foundation that's going to last.

I won't ask for a show of hands. I know many of you are already doing this. I also know many are not. (It starts with the basics.) How many of us here today are reading our Bibles each day? How many of us here today are making time every day to talk with God in prayer?

Jesus said it's those who hear his Word and do it. It's those who listen to what he's saying and actually live it out. Don't be foolish. (Those are the basics.) If you're not reading God's Word, how will you hear? If you're not talking (each day) with your Creator, how will you know what he wants?

Again, this isn't about how we get into heaven. This isn't about how we become right with God. The promise of heaven is already yours in Jesus. You are already right with God because of Christ. It's done. It's finished. The work has been completed on the cross. Your sins have already been washed away and forgiven. The foundation is there. The rock has already been put into place.

That's not the question. The question is, "Where are you building your house? Upon what (and upon whom) are you constructing your life? That's the next step. That's what Jesus is telling us. That's what we are called to do.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the foundation you have already laid for us, for the promise of forgiveness and life that is ours in you. We thank you for the calling we have to be your followers and for the promise that as we follow, you will help us to build and construct a secure and well-standing life's house. Lord, help us to develop the disciplines we need; not to be saved or to become right, but to be able to hear and to listen and to respond. Fill us with your Spirit; guide us by your Word. Help us to be wise as we build. Amen.