

“On Solid Ground”

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June 22, 2014 Sunday School Recognition (Ordinary 9A)

Psalm 46 Matthew 7:24-29

Is your house built on solid ground? Every year we hear stories and see pictures of homes swept away by floods, washed into the ocean by hurricanes, covered by mudslides or crumbled by earthquakes. Where you choose to build and what kind of foundation you construct can make the difference between minor damage, or total destruction when disaster strikes. How strong is the house you live in?

Today Karen read Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount, about the wise man who built his house on rock, and the foolish man who built his house on sand. The Sermon on the Mount takes up three whole chapters of the book of Matthew and is full of wise sayings and challenging teachings of Jesus. And today’s passage is a warning at the very end of the sermon. What are we to do with these teachings of Jesus? How are we to relate to all these things we hear and learn?

Jesus was raised by a carpenter, so he knew a few things about building houses. And he knew that if you don’t build on solid ground, no matter how strong the walls and how beautiful the interior of your house, if you get a big enough storm, it will be destroyed. This is true of houses and buildings. And it’s also true about life.

There will always be storms in life: economic troubles, disappointment, illness, broken or lost relationships, depression, war or other violence. If we build our lives on solid ground, then when the storms of life come, we may be battered around, but we will survive. But if our life does not have a strong foundation, then when we are hit by hardship, our lives will be washed away and ruined.

According to Jesus, it’s not enough to simply hear his words and take them in. You also have to *do* them, put them into practice if you want them to be a source of strength for your life. It’s like physical therapy. What if you pull a muscle in your back, and the therapist gives you some exercises to do for 20 minutes every day? First you have to hear and understand the instructions. But they won’t do you any good unless you actually do them, not just once or twice, but every day. They have to become part of your daily practice if you want to get well and be strong. And so Jesus said, we must hear God’s word and also do it.

Today we recognized our Sunday School teachers and students. Our teachers are doing their best to help our children hear the word and understand it. And they may even help them get started doing it. But the real work of “doing” happens during the week. Children need families and friends to help them build a strong foundation, and show them how people put their faith into practice on a daily basis.

Children learn as much from what they see as what they hear. How do you treat each other at home when no one else is there to see? How do you treat your relatives? Do you show respect and concern for your neighbors, even the ones you're not fond of? Do you welcome people into your home, and offer hospitality to people who are new to the area, or who have no family nearby? Do you think of ways to include your children when you volunteer outside the home? Do you take time to rest and play together, to appreciate nature, to pray and worship, or gather with other people of faith?

During Lent last spring many of you read the book "Practicing Our Faith," or at least part of it. Some chapters are better than others, but each chapter describes one of twelve different practices, helping us be more mindful of ways we can live our faith – from honoring our bodies, to forgiving others, to managing money and possessions, to testimony, singing, and even dying. Even more basic are practices such as prayer, working for justice, or caring for the sick. Even what and how we eat can be a practice of faith. And it's never too late to start building a strong foundation.

Jonathan read from Psalm 46 today, "The Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble." Times of trouble are part of life. Storms will come our way, be they from natural disasters, or storms caused by human greed or violence, or our own shortcomings or bad luck. We hope they don't hit our children at a young age, but they are an inevitable part of life. We can't control the weather, nor many of the bad things that come our way in life. But we can build a strong foundation by practicing our faith, and help our children to do the same, so that when the earth does change and the mountains shake, when we are faced with obstacles or hardship, we can be still and know the Lord of hosts is with us. We can keep our feet planted on solid ground and find our refuge and strength in God.

Amen.