

“Jesus, Our Firm Foundation”

Luke 6:46-49

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With the recession, many people are fixing up their current homes instead of moving to a new place. Richard and Martha thought about moving because their home was looking run down. Due to the economy, they also decided it would be better to just fix up their present home. I should tell you that Martha was a registered nurse, who fussed over every pain or mishap that came Richard's way. But on the day he began the home improvements, it seemed like the stress of their finances was getting to her. Richard started up in the attic, adding needed insulation. Crawling around, he picked up splinters in both hands, and cut one hand on the knife he used to cut the insulation. Next, he went to fix the living room ceiling fan. As he stepped up the ladder, he scratched his forehead on one of the fan blades. On the way down the ladder, he missed the last two rungs and turned his ankle. When he limped into the kitchen, his wife took one look, gasped and said, "Are those your good pants?!" Richard and Martha's home isn't the only thing that needed improvement. It sounds like they could use a little relationship renovation!

While I was preparing for this sermon, I thought about the image of ‘home renovation’ or ‘home remodeling projects.’ I had a chance to watch the remodeling construction work one of my neighbors’ houses. Literally, they rebuilt a new house except for the foundation. If you have a firm foundation, you can easily rebuild a new house. I believe that a firm foundation is very important in every building - both physically and spiritually. This morning, I am not going to talk about your home improvements, but I invite you to check in on your faith, a ‘spiritual foundation’ in your relationship with God: How has your faith been in your life? Is your faith still in excellent shape, not shaken by any storms of life or is it time to ‘remodel’ your faith? I hope that we can learn a good lesson from Jesus’ story this morning.

I want to introduce to you a different version of our Scripture reading, In Eugene Peterson’s work from ‘The Message,’ he paraphrased the Bible. Let’s listen to Jesus’ story again: "Why are you so polite with me, always saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'That's right, sir,' but never doing a thing I tell you? These words I speak to you are not mere additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundation words, words to build a life on. If you work the words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who dug deep and laid the foundation of his house on bedrock. When the river burst its banks

and crashed against the house, nothing could shake it; it was built to last. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a bad carpenter who built a house but skipped the foundation. When the swollen river came crashing in, it collapsed like a house of cards. It was a total loss." (The Message)"

In Jesus' day, there were many false prophets. They were acting like they were the Messiah, the Son of God. They said "Lord, Lord" with great passion, piety and sincerity, yet they did not follow. They were eloquent and convincing, but they did not put their words into practice. Jesus reminded his disciples and his followers that false prophet can be discerned by their "fruits." Your life, attitude and maturity are outcomes of faith.

A couple of years ago, when there were some severe storms during the winter in Sacramento, I remembered that my backyard fence fell down more than three times. I realized that posts were too old and became rotten, so they couldn't sustain the whole fence. I had to replace with new ones. When there were no storms, it was hard to tell whether post were strong enough to sustain or not, but it was easy to tell the difference when the storms came. The ability to follow Christ in a meaningful and real way is rooted in our relationship of faith and trust in God.

Jesus was a carpenter after his father Joseph's profession, and he knew a lot about building. He used an example of house construction. He compared with two different houses in this parable. The criteria is whether we work Jesus' words into our life or not. Jesus knew how easy it was to hear words and agree to them, but it was not enough to know them. All Jesus taught to us was to act on the words and live them out in our life. He talked about perseverance, love, compassion, justice, equality, forgiveness and hospitality more like acting on Jesus' teaching. We need to remember this: Faith is not about knowledge but about transformation. The Bible is not given to us for information but for transformation for our lives. Our United Methodist Church's motto is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for transformation of the world." If we do not want to put the words of Christ into practice, as Jesus pointed out, we are like a bad carpenter who built a house but skipped the foundation.

Here's a funny story I want to share with you: There was a wealthy man who laid blueprints before his secretary and told him, "I'm leaving on an extended trip and I want you to build a house for me in that location above the lake. I'll be gone for ten months. Here are the plans and specs and funds to cover the cost." The astute employee saw a chance to feather his own nest. He hired a crooked contractor, employed unskilled labor whenever possible and put cheap, inferior material into the building. When it was finished, it had the appearance of

magnificence, but it was really a poorly constructed, insubstantial shell. When the employer returned and went with the secretary to see the building, which looked quite beautiful overlooking the lake, he asked the secretary, "What do you think of it?" "I think it's wonderful," the secretary replied. "I'm glad you like it. I'm retiring from business; I won't need your services much longer and I want you to have a nice house in your retirement. This house is yours."

Imagine if you are to build your own dream house, you don't want to be a bad carpenter who skipped the foundation. I believe you want to make sure to build your house on the solid foundation. The difference between standing and falling is not in the house, not in the storm, but in the foundation. In a sense, we are all builders. We are building our faith with the words of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, there will be a storm coming which will test our life-house. We better be a smart carpenter who digs deep and lays our foundation on bedrock.

Jesus wants us to follow his words and to build our lives on these words. He wants us to be ready for the storms of life: These storms can be economic downturns, personal struggles, broken relationships, despair, depression, death of those who love us and whom we love, chronic illness, loneliness and wounded hearts. Will we stand on Jesus, our firm foundation? Jesus as our Lord and Savior is the rock within whom we can trust and lay our foundation. I pray that God is with us and makes us wise. Amen.