June 23rd, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Sixth Sunday of Eastertide

10:30 am

Built Upon the Cornerstone

1. Break it down

Today’s Gospel lesson is chockfull of information and

directives about how to live a Christ-centred life. It’s so deep and wide that you could separate it into three different sections: ‘The blind leading the blind’, ‘Fruit of the Tree’, and ‘Firm Foundations’. You could write an incredibly long and theologically intense sermon, encapsulating these three intertwined topics. Or you could focus on one to take on. I’ve decided on the latter option – because I’ve heard somewhere that it’s a fine line between a long sermon and a hostage situation.

 So today, we’re going to delve deep into verses 46-49, where we hear about how important it is to build our faith on a firm foundation so that when tough stuff comes our way, our faith still stays intact.

II. As Easy as the Three Little Bears

 Do you remember that story as a kid, (I spoke about at children’s time, again) – The Three Little Pigs. The mom says to her three little pigs – go out and make a home and do it well – do it the best you can, because that’s how you’ll get far in this world.

 And so it goes, you have the three little pigs, one who uses straw, one who uses sticks, and another that uses bricks. And when the big bad wolf comes along, as the story goes, the brick is the only house that is left standing. And then mom comes back and congratulates the son who built a house of bricks because he was wise and did the best he could.

 Now, often, we think stories for children are only meant for children, but actually, the metaphors are just as reasonable for adults as the children. We know, we know well that if you were to go into your yard and get to straw or sticks, when a heavy rain comes – it’s going to wash away. But if you get out some bricks, maybe put some mortar on them, you’ll find that stays right in place. We know this. Then why don’t we live by it?

 And what I mean by that, is that we are called to have a firm foundation of bricks. If you want to build a firm foundation of faith – you want the cornerstone of Jesus, you want Jesus to be the pinnacle example of what it means to live and to live. And from there, your bricks are things like Christian Education, where you learn the stories and meanings of Scripture, or Mission, where you take another brick and lay it down in service, or prayer, steadfast prayer that is honest, true, and authentic to who you are and whose you are. And brick by brick, you build a faith that when the tough stuff of life comes up, maybe a brick falls down, maybe one cracks, but the whole thing isn’t going to sink.

 We have to be careful of building life with straw or sticks – and in this metaphor, I would say, sticks and straws are like knowing one line of Scripture, but not knowing at all where the context comes from or what it means to faithfully interpret it. A stick or straw could be a rote prayer that really doesn’t mean much to you, but you feel like you need to do it out of obligation. A straw or a stick could be closing down and shutting down, not letting the Holy Spirit do any good work. Straws and sticks will build up, they will get you somewhere for a while, but eventually, when something tough comes up, it all gets blown away. And then what do you have left to work with? Nothing.

 So the call is strong and perhaps that’s why there are so many hymns about strong or firm foundations, because we understand that it is vital to build upon what we know through Scripture. So, once you have that structure built, once you feel like you’ve got that foundation on the ground – where do you go next?

1. Living a life of faith

I’ve been listening to some of my favourite Christian tunes from the 90s, perhaps a sentimental throwback to different days. One of my favourite bands, DC Talk, wrote the song, ‘What if I Stumble?’ and it opens with this written word:

 “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today, is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips – then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

 Those words, my friends, are convicting words, when you let them sink down and settle in your heart. I may stand before you in this pulpit, perhaps with the hat of a theological education, but I know that it means nothing at all, if I walk out those sanctuary doors and do nothing with what I learned. If I walk out those doors, and deny Christ, not only have I wasted a lot of money on education, but I’ve proven every one who tells me that God doesn’t exist right.

 And that’s the convicting word right there, for you and for me, if we come once a week or once a month or once a year to this sanctuary, hear the Scripture, proclaim it to be true, and sing songs of joy and contemplation – and then we go out there into the great big world an do nothing...well, you’ve wasted an hour of your life here.

 Our job, this morning and every morning together, is to build upon that foundation of faith – to affirm again and again who we are, what we believe, and give praise to the creator who gave us life. As we read the Scriptures, we are laying down the brick and pouring in the concrete, taking this time to stabilize and to learn. This hour is important, and any capacity in which you build upon your faith, strengthens the foundation.

IV. The Challenge

 So, there’s quite a few things I’m going to challenge you to today – and you can do all of them or choose one of them to work on. The first challenge is this – take your foundations seriously. Because when the hard and difficult things of life come this way, you’re going to want that foundation. Read, pray, sing, join in conversation with people of faith and no faith, but lay down those bricks. And if you stumble, if you fall, if something bad happens – maybe a brick cracks, but your life is not blown away.

 The second challenge is this, the same message really that comes from that line in the DC Talk song. In that foundation you’ve built – go and live it. Don’t stop at reading and praying and singing – go out into the world and live it. Let us not be hypocrites – let us not profess Jesus as cornerstone and then go out into the world and deny him by what we say, do and act. Let us not be ashamed, and let us not be boastful, but let us be a people that through our love and generosity and kindness, show to unbelieving people the power of a life of faith.

 This makes for a great Segway – you have the opportunity to both build your foundations of faith and live them out here this week at C.I.A. Week. Tonight, we are feeding the hungry – do you need to tell them all about Jesus? Maybe, no, it depends what conversation you find yourself in. But rather, what I think is more moving is to let them know and feel a love that the world does not otherwise show the hungry. Live out your faith in love, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, thank the heroes, recognize God’s good gift of creation, and come together in community to find that we together are stronger, and together we are more alike than different. Come this week, come to build and live out that foundation we have been so blessed to find in Jesus Christ. Amen.