

A Faith Well-founded

Psalm 118:19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

Matthew 7:13-14, 21-27

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”*

Matthew 7:24 (NRSV)¹

Following the way of Jesus is *never* easy. It’s not any easy path to take.

I

When you find yourself feeling a bit ‘smug’ about your faith...maybe even a ‘tad self-righteous’ toward those you consider to be ‘lesser Christians’ than yourself... Then pull-out this ‘sermon’ of Jesus – in Matthew (chapters 5, 6, and 7) – and give yourself a ‘reality check.’

Read again what Jesus says about ‘anger’ and ‘name-calling and ‘loving your enemies.’²

Consider once more what ‘God with us’ has to say about ‘lust,’ ‘adultery,’ and ‘divorce.’³

Ponder the consequences he gives for ‘swearing’ in the name of God, ‘making a show’ of our personal piety, and ‘worrying’ almost endlessly about the exigencies of life.⁴

If your attitude begins to resemble that of a rich young man who seems to *believe* he’s following *every* commandment of God...then the words Jesus gave to him are surely for you as well... “If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.”⁵

I guarantee...*that* will take care of most of us...pretty quickly! **Why?**

Because following the way of Jesus is **hard**...it is narrow...and it is *never* easy! Don’t be fooled into thinking otherwise. If we had to do it by ourselves...we’d never make it.

So rather than denigrating those **you** consider to be ‘greater sinners’ than you...because they don’t happen to live the way you do...or make the same choices that you make...then think again! We are all in this boat together. There’s no ‘First Class’...We’re all in steerage!

Our task as Christians is to **invite and include and encourage** others to join with us on the journey with Jesus. For him, remember, that journey led to a cross at Golgotha.

The hour – the minute – we begin to ‘distance’ or ‘separate ourselves’ from sinners – the ones whom Jesus came to seek and to save...is the very hour – the very minute – we distance ourselves from the Son of Man...who comes to save us all...even the likes of you and me!

II

Our two scripture lessons from Matthew... The first, from the end of *Jesus’ sermon* on a mountainside in Galilee... The second, *the entrance Jesus made* through a somewhat narrow gate into Jerusalem on ‘Palm Sunday’... Both remind us of the challenging, difficult way it is for us – for anyone – who seeks to follow Jesus.

In the sermon, Jesus compares it to walking through a narrow gate. Why is that narrow maneuver so difficult? *Maybe* because Jesus knows that you and I (and most people) carry far too much ‘baggage’ with us when we travel in this world... *We can’t fit through!*

Figuratively...

We **carry** the baggage of *resentment* and *anger* toward those we dislike.

We **bear** the load of heavy *burdens* and *worry* for those we love...who seem less than whole.

We **lug-around** our prized *possessions* and *achievements* as if they’ll provide us comfort in the ‘hereafter’ – or life to come.

When Jesus is commending the ‘narrow and hard road’ before us, he’s reminding us of a key lesson in discipleship... We don’t need all the *stuff* – the baggage we tote around this world. Honestly, the One...the only One we need is him. It’s not complicated...but **neither** is it easy – we may find.

“For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few that find it.”⁶

May you, by grace, be one who travels that way.

III

Then a bit later – just before he wraps-up this ‘homiletical endeavor’ on the hillside...

Jesus concludes that those who truly embrace the tough teachings he gives are like wise builders.

(Some of us in the Northern Neck may be able to relate to the ‘rock and sand’ analogy!)

If we happen to live in a house built on anything less than ‘sure footing’...well, you know... There are cracks in the walls and doors that stick or fail to shut.

But what Jesus is really saying is...build a faith in God that is well-founded.

“Everyone...who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock...”⁷

So how, by grace, may we construct a life of faith that is well-founded? Or, as one member questioned – as we and others read this text this week... “Who is the rock on which we are called to build?”

To my thinking...the true rock of faith on which you and I may build our lives is Jesus Christ...the Head and cornerstone...the stone which other builders rejected ...but the sure foundation for us in life, in death, in life beyond death.

But building a well-founded faith in Jesus is never easy... **Why** is that?

Listen to his teachings.

Follow what he says.

Forgive the wrongs of others.

Learn to love and bless your enemies.

Deny yourself...your wants and desires.

Take-up your cross and follow him.

No storm can shake my inmost calm
 while to that rock I'm clinging.
 Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
 How can I keep from singing?¹⁰

That's a narrow, hard road that Jesus walked...for us...and with us.

**By grace, be one who journeys on...
 through his Passion...to life everlasting...
 A faith well-founded!**

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Endnotes

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² See especially Matthew 5:22, 25 and 44.

³ See Matthew 5:28, and 31.

⁴ See Matthew 5:34, 6:1 and 25 ff.

⁵ Matthew 19:16-22, **The New Oxford Annotated Bible – New Revised Standard Version** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 28-29 NT.

⁶ Matthew 7:14, p. 10 NT.

⁷ Matthew 7:24.

⁸ Matthew 7:25.

⁹ Peter Sethre, "God's Pause," Saturday, 4/12/14, Luther Seminary, ELCA, St. Paul, MN.

¹⁰ Robert Lowry, text and music, 1869, "My Life Flows On" (How Can I Keep from Singing?), No. 821, **Glory to God – The Presbyterian Hymnal** (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).