

Shaky Foundations  
Matthew 7:24-29  
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St. John United Methodist Church  
Anchorage, Alaska  
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Our planet has been hit hard in recent weeks with hurricanes and earthquakes. In 1992 Hurricane Andrew plowed through Florida and Louisiana leaving a path of destruction in its wake. In the aftermath of that devastation there were many investigative reports on TV portraying the shoddy construction of many homes which helped contribute to the devastation. There were 27 Habitat for Humanity homes in Florida which endured Andrew's fury. Not one of those homes, NOT ONE was destroyed by the hurricane!

I share this story because it serves as a kind of modern version of Jesus' telling of the wise and foolish home builders in the Sermon on the Mount. Homebuilding, carpentry was certainly a subject Jesus was familiar with since he grew up with a father who made his living building things. When he talked about the wise man building a house on solid rock he understood the importance of a good foundation. And so the message is simple: You and I need to build our lives on the solid foundation of Christ and his words. Our future depends on solid foundations.

Some of you are old enough to remember the Fram oil filter commercials. They wanted us to think about the future consequences of using a low-quality oil filter. Which would you rather do: spend a little more on a Fram filter or big bucks to repair a broken engine? What was it the mechanic said, "You can pay me now, or you can pay me later."

Jesus wants us to think about the future consequences of our present decisions. To teenagers this is a very adult thing to do. Adults are always making teens think about the future consequences of present actions. Do we think about the respiratory problems, not to mention lung cancer when we smoke cigarettes? Do we picture in our minds the possibility of being in a fatal accident when we fail to put on our seat belts?

When I was a teenager I remember thinking that future consequences were for old people who didn't have any fun. I was painting the exterior of our house and came to the point where I needed to go higher. Do you think I could have taken the time to get a ladder? Heck no! There was a picnic table right there. I stood on the table and continued to paint. But then I need to paint even higher, so I stacked the bench on top of the picnic table and stood on that to paint. And then the other bench on top of that one. It wasn't a few moments later that the table tilted and I came crashing to the ground. All I remember was a bruised ego and white paint splattered all over my body!

Shaky foundations. What shoddy materials went into the building of your life's foundation? Are there broken places in need of repair? Maybe there were deficiencies in your childhood that left some cracks in the foundation of your life. You've invested a great deal of energy to keep those cracks hidden from public

view. Everything looks great on the outside, but inside it's a different story. Perhaps when you were young you never learned how to handle your anger in appropriate ways. Maybe you cheated just a little bit in high school, but now you've graduated to cheating on your taxes. How would you know what cracks are there unless time is taken to dig down to the foundation of your soul for a peek?

I want to suggest two ways to know if your foundation needs some reinforcing or repairs.

A good place to begin is to look at your secrets. We all have secrets. We have had thoughts of which we are not proud. We have said things we regret. We have exaggerated the truth and have lied. We have damaged things and those we love with acts of violence. By bringing our secrets into the light of our consciousness we begin to understand what lies behind them. What are we trying to cover up?

Mary Ann O'Rourke talks about her secrets. "I was raised to keep all the family secrets and present myself in such a way that people would be either envious or approving. But keeping up a façade like that takes so much energy. When my friend Pammy was going through chemotherapy, and I asked her if the dress I was wearing made me look fat, I was making a fuss about the dumbest things, and Pammy looked at me and said, Annie, you just don't have that kind of time. It was so profound, it was like I was in a cartoon and somebody conked me over the head. I got it. Pammy died seven years ago. But I still live by her words: You don't have time to live a lie. You don't have time to get the world to approve of you. You only have the time to become the person you dream of being. You only have the time to clean out your mean and ugly spots, areas that drag you down and hurt other people. You only have the time to accept yourself as you are and start getting a little bit healthier so you can be who God needs you to be. In a way, it's exhilarating to say, This is really who I am, and I'm not going to pretend just because I have the sneaking suspicion I'm not good enough. God meets you where you are."<sup>1</sup>

We may not be ready to spill our secrets to a trusted friend or family member, but perhaps we can at least begin with ourselves. Perhaps we can begin with being honest with ourselves and God, and acknowledge some of the secrets that may cover up a shaky foundation.

A second way to deal with shaky foundations has to do with desire. How badly do we want a solid foundation? How much do we desire a life of integrity, honesty, and faithfulness? We need to get to the point where we truly WANT a solid foundation so much that we are willing to endure the mess that comes with repair work. People who are in recovery from addiction understand this all too well. The first step is to admit you are powerless to control your life. Wanting a life built on a solid foundation often means facing some pretty ugly and broken parts that went into the building of your life's foundation.

The time has come to give up the pretenses! The world is hungry to see authentic Christians who live out the words of Jesus for the long haul. No doubt that to live in this world with a deep and long-lasting commitment to Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> -Mary Ann O'Roark, an interview with Anne Lamott, reprinted from Clarity magazine.

will involve conflict, pain, and loneliness. We are warned to carefully count the cost and consider our choices. But we are here to be a part of the construction of the kingdom of God. It's a kingdom God is building, not just out there somewhere, but right here in our hearts! And so we are challenged to hear the words of Jesus and to act on them not just for ourselves, but for others as well.

I've heard many church leaders talk about youth as the church of tomorrow. We often talk about our hope being in the next generation. United Methodist pastor, J. Ellsworth Kalas, doesn't believe it. He writes, "Our hope is in the past generation - or perhaps, more exactly, the one that is currently becoming past. The next generation is quite unlikely to come up with moral commitments better than those their forebears have taught them. If the future is to be what it ought to be - if it is to be wonderfully right - it will probably be because the current generation has laid a foundation of ethical character."<sup>2</sup>

What kind of foundation is your life built upon? The foolishness of this world, or the cornerstone of Jesus Christ? What are your ethics? How do you behave morally when no one else is around?

John Smith was a loyal carpenter, working for a very successful building contractor who called him into his office one day and said, "John, I'm putting you in charge of the next house we build. I want you to order all the materials and oversee the whole job from the ground up." John accepted the assignment with great enthusiasm and excitement. For ten days before ground was broken at the building site, John studied the blueprints. He checked every measurement, every specification. Suddenly he had a thought. "If I am really in charge," he said to himself, "why couldn't I cut a few corners, use less-expensive materials, and put the extra money in my pocket? Who would know the difference? Once the house is painted, it will look just great." So John set about his scheme. He ordered second-grade lumber, but his reports indicated that it was top-grade. He ordered inexpensive concrete for the foundation, put in cheap wiring, and cut every corner he could, yet he reported the purchase of much better materials. When the home was completed and fully painted, he asked the contractor to come and see it. "John," said the contractor, "What a magnificent job you have done! You have been such a good and faithful carpenter all these years that I have decided to show my gratitude by giving you this house you have built, as a gift!"

Life is like the building of a home. If the foundation is strong, there is real strength for the future. If the proper materials go into the construction, it will last a long time. But if we build with shoddy materials, cut corners, and take the easy way out, we build a weak house on a poor foundation.

A long time ago Jesus challenged the people who gathered to hear his words. The time is different, but the words are the same. The challenge is the same. Christ calls you and me to hear his words and act on them, so that we may be like the wise one who built a home on a solid foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> -J. Ellsworth Kalas, *The Ten Commandments from the Back Side* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 60.