

## **Parables for Pilgrims – The two house builders**

### **Luke 6: 46 – 69**

‘Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?’

Let us pray....

God of our life there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down: when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening: when our lives have no music in them and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech you, tune our hearts to brave music; give us the sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age; and so quicken our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life, to your honour and glory. Amen

At first look this parable - the wise man and the foolish builder is about faith, about having firm foundations in God the Rock. There is a storm and we all know about storms. No matter whether your house is built on rock or sand, the storms will come. And we say to our friends, have a little faith, don't worry, it will all work out in the end.

But a closer look at this parable and there is more to it than just having faith or knowing God.

The second verse of this passage reads ‘I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice’.

This parable is about having faith and actually building on it. Don't just believe what I say says Jesus – do it. Build your life on it.

We know his commands and many of us pay lip service to them, it's easy enough to do that from the pulpit. What this parable is saying is that it is not enough to know that Jesus is Lord we need to do something about it.

My interpretation of this parable is that the rock in the story represents God (I guess that's what they call a no brainer!) The sand is the worldly other stuff and the house represents us and what we do with our lives, how we live out our faith.

And being rooted in God is the way that we may truly come to terms with who we are - the real us, the very being of us without the bluff.

Sand can be well packed and nicely so, it can look like a firm foundation. Rock is much harder to dig into, it takes time and effort. But it is a sure foundation on which to build.

Sand may also look like success. The world wants us to get the right career, achieve our dreams, and plan our lives. However, I think the Kingdom is different.

Storms in life will come, whether you have built your house on the rock or on the sand. Sometimes plans and projects that you have spent time and love building come crashing down and those times will be devastating. Tests of life come to us all.

I've been looking at some tricky topics during this term at St Mellitus such as medical ethics, euthanasia and assisted suicide. I think these topics are far too sensitive and pastoral to talk about here but what I will say is that I have had a chance to re-assess what I think about these issues and have been confronted with some worldly views contrasted with a biblical or faith perspective.

We had a guest lecturer last week who suffers from a rare form of Motor Neurone Disease, he is now confined to a wheel chair and his speech now makes him difficult to understand. Nonetheless he came in to deliver a lecture and most of us were able to tune in to his speech eventually. His name is Michael Wenham and he showed us a youtube clip called 'life is precious' in which he makes some profound points that relate to us all. He said:

'I don't think God loves us because of what we do. He loves us because of who we are. He made us. He gives me time to look out of the window to watch a spider at work. I see the small things and the big beautiful things.'

Michael says he looks forward to one day having a transformed body and to be able to dance and worship. Michael's own body is dying, slowly and painfully.

He is an intelligent man, who was once active and energetic and is now severely disabled. He has had to seriously re-assess his life, and change his outlook. Despite his illness he points to something deep, something that really matters about what it means to be truly human.

This man does not play sports, he cannot clothe or dress or even feed himself. He is not at the top of a successful career *but* he has a strong faith and he continues on with living. He is vulnerable and disabled and his determination not to give up hope is the foundation which gives him the strength to get through the really difficult days. God says my strength is made perfect in weakness, and of course Jesus suffered also and understands, his own body was destroyed on the cross.

When Jesus was crucified his disciples fled, where was their faith? Their world came crashing down and yet despite Peter denying the Christ three times he was still 'the rock' on which the Church was built.

We all have faults and failures. Even Peter wasn't always a steady witness. And if we are honest with ourselves we may be able to see where parts of our lives are built on rock and part is on the sand. Let's face it; we all want well built houses with firm foundations and I'm not talking about getting on the London property ladder!

'When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built'.

Sometimes a few walls or houses have to be knocked down, so that we can see where we are truly standing – is it on the rock or is it on the sand?

You can still build castles on the sand. But God knows about its foundations.

Picture the scene: on a summer's day, children and families build sand castles on the beach. Impressive sand castles carefully made and to stop the water coming in there are a couple of strategies we could use – one is to dig a ditch around the castle like a mote to trap the oncoming water. Another is to build a fortress with rocks to form a barrier to protect the castles. But these plans are futile. No matter what you do you can't stop the water from the sea coming in to wash over the castles and in the end there will be a big messy splurge of sand, despite the effort.

Now the same rocks can form a barrier around the house built on firmer foundations, when the storm comes and the house is shaken. Those rocks will do the job of protecting the house just fine because the foundation is strong.

Life-quakes may appear to do us harm, but also they also play a part in uncovering of who we are before God.

Building and re-building may involve a change at a deeper level, a deep change of heart, and this is excavation work; it may be slow and painstaking.

But building on a right foundation is worth building on.

I think wisdom in building is going to involve prayer, listening to God and being ready to hear something different. To seek out wisdom and the Kingdom values which underpin what we do.

Buildings and builders are still very much relevant for us today as they were in Jesus time. The first hearers of this parable would have known the context of the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem. Herod, the great – was a great builder and was re-building the temple.

Luke, the writer of this gospel was keen to show that the temple of Jerusalem was under God's judgement - because its rulers hadn't obeyed Jesus' call to a different way of obedience.

But still, this message applies to all sorts of people and all sorts of situations. One of the lasting achievements of Jesus was that he could tell such good stories; they speak to us in this age and every age.

There is another story about building that I hope you don't mind me sharing with you, it is not story from the bible but no doubt it is one that you will have heard before:

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs. The first pig build a house made of straw - for some reason he chose straw as his building material of choice.

And one day along comes a hungry wolf, 'little pig, little pig – let me come in' No says the pig. Well then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down.

Oh crumbs! Says the pig and he runs next door to pig cottage number two.

So the wolf blows down the straw house but finds no little pig within to make a bacon sandwich out of.

And so he moves on to the house next door, pig cottage number 2 made of sticks: Little pig, little pig let me come in?

No we won't says the pig! Well then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down.

And now the tensions rising, both little pigs run out of the house. It won't protect them even though it's made of stivks.

The wolf blows down the house and the pigs seek refuge in a third house, pig mansion number 3. But this time the house is made of brick.

The wolf knocks on the door: Little pig, little pig let me come in!

We will not says the pigs. Well then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down.

So the wolf huffed and he puffed but he could not blow the house down. The house was strong, solid brick and it was not shaken by the puffing wolf.

What's a hungry wolf to do? So with the three pigs safely inside he decides to climb down the chimney.

Thankfully pig number three was a wise piggy, not only had he built the house with bricks he also had fire place with a big pot of boiling water for the wolf to fall into.

The moral of the story....beware of the big bad wolf, be a wise piggy, save your bacon and build with bricks.

And if you don't relate to the pigs, and see yourself more as a huffing, puffing wolf remember you won't get your breakfast if you end up in the melting pot.

We are all builders, all of us. And we must be careful to build wisely. Rooted and built up in Christ so that we can withstand the storm.

I wasn't here last week but I read JT's sermon online and he mentioned 'Ubuntu': Archbishop Desmond Tutu has taught us in the west about the African concept of Ubuntu. That we are people because of other people. 'I am because you are'.

Rowan William said something quite similar this week. Our history is part of someone else's history. No one can write an autobiography without mentioning other people. We are linked and connected despite it all; sometimes we may need another's help and we may need to learn how to handle the wolf so he doesn't blow our own house down.

We want to be good builders and build each other up, encourage one another rather than anything else.

Building our lives based on God requires commitment and prayerful action. It is not going to be simple, quick or easy. Our own plans for our lives won't always come to fruition. Remember its God that made us. God loves us and he has purposes. Life is gift from God, and what we do with our life is our gift back to God. Amen