

## Matthew 7: 1-14, 24-29

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Rock in which we build our lives, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.

A Rabbi and a Soap Maker went for a walk one day at the park and studied the people who had come out to enjoy the warm summer day. After going about a mile along the path the soap maker suddenly turned to the Rabbi and said to him, “Rabbi, what good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery that exists in the world! There is still such sin and sadness, even after so many years of teaching and preaching about goodness and truth and peace. If religion is good and true, why should this be?” The Rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until the Rabbi happened to see a child playing in the dirt. The Rabbi said to the soap maker, “Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that boy. What good is soap? With all the soap in the world, over all these years, even with all the soap ads on TV and doctors telling us to kill germs with soap, that child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is after all!” The soap maker protested and exclaimed to the Rabbi; ‘But Rabbi soap can’t do anything unless it is used.’ With a nod the Rabbi said; “Exactly.”

Our scripture for today clearly says there’s action inextricably tied to our faith. The book of James tells us that faith without works is dead. The soap of our faith must be put to use in order for it to be relevant in our lives. I would add that the more we use our faith in action to trust Jesus and to serve our neighbors, the

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more relevant it becomes. This is a very difficult concept for us Lutherans to appreciate. Many of us grew up hearing countless sermons berating the vices of work-righteousness. I've given more than a few of those sermons myself...

Martin Luther and other 16th century reformers protested mightily against a faith that was not really faith, but self-achievement trying to please or appease an angry God and avoid God's wrath with our good works and demonstrations to God of just how good and righteous we really are... The reformers were right in their fears concerning works-righteousness, but the end result today may be that we have forgotten that faith does have an "action" component. Faith requires "doing" on our part, not to please God, but in response to what God has already done for us. Faith and good works are like two sides of the same coin.

Our faith, which is the same as our trust in God's Word, is the foundation on which we build our lives. We all have faith or trust in something. Many of us put our trust in our bank accounts or our 401Ks. We struggle and save for that rainy day putting our faith in the almighty... dollar. What happens when the stock market plummets or inflation eats away at that savings? Trusting in our ability to accumulate, and then keep a large nest egg is like the foolish man building his house on the sand... Jesus calls us to return to God and God's Word as the place where we put our faith and our trust. On the foundation of Faith in God's promises we can withstand the hurricanes that blow through our lives.

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Florida is known as the Sunshine State. Lots of people are fleeing northern states and moving to Florida. They do have lot's of sunshine, but also no state income taxes and other state laws and regulations that appeal to lot's of folks. I do like the sun, but there's too many bugs and hurricanes there for me... Yes... There's the matter of all those hurricanes... After one recent hurricane a reporter was talking to a man whose house was the only one left standing in the entire neighborhood. The reporter asked the owner of the house why his home was still standing amid all the destruction around. The man answered that he had built the house himself and had followed all the building codes for the state of Florida to the letter. If the code said to use 2 X 6 roof joists, that's exactly what he did. The result of following the Florida building code's rules was that his house stood firm against the worst forces mother nature could blow his way. It's a literal example of the Children's song we heard earlier.

We've been slowly reading our way through Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount for the past few weeks. Jesus began with some illustrations of what a life built on the foundation of Jesus's love and Jesus' righteousness looks like. We call that part of his sermon, The Beatitudes. Then we heard Jesus teaching His followers how to pray and He invited them to build up treasures in heaven rather than here on earth. Today Jesus gives us more practical advice on

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how to live under the reign of God here on earth. It all begins with the foundation of faith, but it doesn't stop there.

All of us have storms that periodically blow through our lives. I know some of you are dealing with health concerns. Others are caregivers for the ones we love. Still others have recently lost ones we love. Some of us have been adversely affected by the poor economy and still others are in abusive and degrading relationships and have no idea how to either move on or improve their situations. The metaphor of building a house on the rock solid foundation applies to our lives and every situation of our lives. If faith or trusting the promises of God are the foundation, then our serving and our worshipping are the bricks that make up the rest of the house. They are the constant fortifications that continue to keep the hurricane winds and rains at bay.

Unfortunately, there are many people who love going to Church and enjoy meeting fellow Christians. They love to sing familiar hymns and read Christian literature, but they don't associate what they are doing and saying with what is happening in their life. The Words of Christ do not penetrate to the point of making a difference in the way they live their lives. In my life I seem to fluctuate between trying to live out my faith and doing my own thing... When things seem to be going along fairly smoothly, I just go through the motions of faith. I don't really think too much about what I'm doing or how I'm living that faith in daily

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life. Then something happens as it did this past week where out of the blue tragedy strikes and I'm sort of shocked back to the rock of my faith. If it weren't for that foundation I'm not sure how I, or any of us, can stand up to the junk the world or the devil or just the forces of evil throw against us. When everything we love is stripped away, what's left for you? For me it's a strong trust that God is still in control and Jesus' work has done it's job well and completely, and that the Holy Spirit not only comforts me, but also calls me back to the loving arms of the God who loves me and gave everything for me... For me at least, that's how trusting in the promises of God and resting on the righteousness of Jesus and not my own forms the basis for living.

May our Father, the God of creation, may the only begotten Son, the God of our salvation, and the Holy Spirit, the God of our continued sanctification keep you in His loving care and be the foundation you build your life on. When the storms come, and they will, if they haven't already, may that same God comfort you and assure you that your ultimate fate is not in question because the entire price of your salvation has already been paid on the cross by our Savior, Jesus Christ. May the Golden rule guide your life as you continue to build your life on the solid rock of Jesus' love and his righteousness. Amen.