

Two Foundations

One of my favorite hymns (and yes, I have many!) is How Firm a Foundation. The first line is “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word!” Of course, I think of this hymn when I read the verses from Matthew; Jesus’ teaching about the two foundations. I know many also love the hymn, My Hope is Built, with the refrain, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

But I have a problem—we have a problem—in connecting these beloved songs to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew. I really love the firm foundation and God is with me in hard times of How Firm a Foundation. And of course we love the theme of hope in the other hymn. But we are missing the point. And that is what Jesus is saying: if you just listen you are missing the point. Words are all very well, but what gives us hope and a firm foundation is putting them into practice. Look at the verses at the beginning of this devotional again. You see?

Even though we differ mightily about what it means to put Jesus’ words into practice, it is still better to practice in some way than just to read, listen, and even know the words by heart. Sinking sand. I cannot help but think of all the buildings, homes, and more that are built on the shores of our rising oceans in a time of stronger storms. And yet many continue to be built, rebuilt and lived in “for the view!” We don’t live in the Word just because it is pretty, but because it calls us to change our hearts and lives.

What I have found helpful in living out this teaching of Jesus is to have another version of two foundations: abiding in Christ and abounding for Christ. Abiding in Christ is all the listening, reading, worship, prayer, fasting and so on of our personal and corporate discipleship. Abounding are the discipleship activities of serving, giving, giving up, testifying, going: acts of mercy and justice. These are actions that have an impact on others for good in the name of Jesus. It is probably best not to get too specific about what this should look like. Just ask yourself regularly “How am I abiding in Christ?” “How am I abounding for Christ?”

We are about a week away from the beginning of Lent. I am pondering now how I can really strengthen these two foundations in this season. How can I abide more with Christ? How can I abound more for Christ? Surely this makes more sense than simply giving up something for Lent. And what might it mean for our church and community if we all not only thought about how to live this way, but actually did it? We would not only stand on rock, but we WOULD rock!

by Rev Karen Oehl

*Everybody who hears
these words of mine
and puts them into
practice is like a
wise builder who
built a house on
bedrock. But
everybody who hears
these words of mine
and doesn't put them
into practice will be
like a fool who built
a house on sand.*

Matthew 7:24,26

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