

Foundations
By Jason Huff
Isaiah 28:16-18a, Galatians 5:22-25, Luke 6:39-49

Our third reading this morning is from Luke 6:39-49. A couple of weeks ago, we began hearing Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. The sermon ends with this week's reading. Here's what Luke writes. "He also told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

Whatever you may think, you do not want to become a sermon illustration. We pastors love to have a good story to tell about some famous person or some outrageous happening that makes the Biblical story come alive in a new and exciting way. But what no one ever told me before is that becoming a sermon illustration is dangerous. At least that's what I found out this week!

As some of you may know, after confirmation class last Sunday afternoon I headed on a whirlwind trip down to Indianapolis to pick up some long-awaited furniture. I had a trailer, courtesy of my friend Mike Alm and his family. I had 24 packing blankets courtesy of UHaul. I thought I was thoroughly prepared for my journey. But just north of Fort Wayne, I realized that I wasn't as completely prepared as I thought I was, and this is why...
[picture onscreen]

Yep...that's my windshield. A massive hawk or something similar glanced off the car a lane over in front of me and then smacked into me at 70 miles an hour. I don't know what that bird was thinking! I know what I was thinking. I was thinking...YAWWHHHGGGGG! The next thoughts in my mind were, I'm gonna die, my hand is bleeding, there's glass all over the car, and Mike is never going to get his trailer back! After calming down a little, I realized that things were OK. The scratches on my hand were really superficial. The car was fine other than the dent in the windshield. But when you have a situation like that, where one moment everything is fine and the next minute the world in front of you is literally crashing in, you start to think about the foundations of your life, and whether you truly believe what you say you do.

That's where today's passage comes into play. For those who've written commentaries on Luke, this is one of those places where many of them throw their hands up in the air and say, "Jesus is saying all sorts of things on all sorts of topics and seeing how they stick." They rarely say that this section holds together, and they point out that while Luke calls it all one parable, there are different stories and styles sitting right next to each other. It's like this is the greatest of Jesus' one-hit wonders. But when I read through it, I saw Jesus asking us to look at the foundation of our lives. Every last part of this section makes us ask ourselves: what is my foundation?

The first way Jesus starts talking about foundations is by showing us that who we trust to guide us and lead us and be our foundation matters a lot. What good is a blind man leading a blind man? It's useless – everybody falls in a pit. In the same way, Jesus says, a student cannot be above the teacher, and once the student is fully trained, he is like his teacher. Blind teachers make for blind students. A student might have loads of potential, but trained by the wrong teacher, that potential is wasted.

Back to the windshield story. After I made it down to Indianapolis and got some dinner, I got on my phone and called my insurance company. After some false starts I'll talk about in a minute, I got a really friendly gal on the line who took down all the information about what happened. All was going well until she asked me where it happened. "I was traveling south on I-69 just before the first Fort Wayne exit," I said. Then she asked, completely seriously, "Can you tell me what the cross streets were?" I actually paused for a second because I wasn't sure she understood or heard me right. So I said again, "See, um...you know, I was on the interstate between exits." Then after a minute she comes back on and says, "Well, that's OK, I guess...we don't *have* to know the cross streets." I couldn't help it...my palm suddenly smacked my forehead. Now she was genuinely a nice person, working at 10:30 at night on a Sunday night. And you know just like I do what was happening. She was typing everything into some insurance computer program, and the program wanted to know the cross-streets. It didn't matter that it made no sense. She had been trained on the program. Her teacher had said, "Always get the cross-streets." So she tried. She didn't use her common sense because it had been trained right out of her.

In the same way, Jesus is asking us to make certain we aren't basing our lives on the training of a blind teacher. The media teaches an awful lot of us these days. I've lived in a lot of places and seen newscasts around the country and overseas, but I've never seen news quite like Detroit. It could depress a hyena! But the question we have ask is this: are those sources reliable? Or are we trusting a blind teacher, one who knows a lot but doesn't have the right perspective? The same is true of our spiritual lives. Are we reading the Bible and learning for ourselves? Are we listening to good, solid preaching that makes the Scripture come alive? Or do we listen to the latest fad on Oprah that tells us that we'll be wealthy and successful if we only try this new way of positive thinking? Jesus tells us that we cannot be better than the teachers we have. We have to make sure our lives are founded on His teachings and not on some substitute or counterfeit.

Then Jesus moves on to one of His most famous sayings. You've got a log in your eye, Jesus says. Why are you worried about getting the speck out of your brother's eye? Jesus says, get the log out first, and then you can do something to really help your brother. Otherwise, you're wasting your time. In fact, you might do more damage.

Believe it or not, that's just like another part of my story. I told you being a sermon example was not all it's cracked up to be! When I called into my insurance company to get my windshield fixed, it took them ten minutes to get me to their glass repair department. I spent another ten minutes on the line with the representative there. Near the very end of our conversation, she asked me, "Was anyone injured in the accident?" I said, "No, I had a couple of really minor scrapes on my hand from the glass coming out of the windshield, but they were less than a millimeter each. They aren't anything." "But that's a problem," she said, "that's an injury." I had to go back and wait another 15 minutes for them to get to the right operator, then another 15 minutes for me to tell them that I was not in fact injured in any way that could need medical attention, but they still wouldn't listen to me. They had to get it all on file, and they even had to have someone call me back on Monday to make certain that I was OK. It took well over an hour to finally get everything resolved and to get back to someone in the glass department to arrange my windshield repair. Now as we all know, the insurance company was just trying to protect itself. But really, my problem needed only about five minutes to go through their system. But the idea of injury suddenly set off all kinds of red flags, and I was actually more inconvenienced by their "log" of procedures than by the true "specks" of glass that cut my hand.

A lot of times, we hear this verse as a call to stop judging people. There's a tendency, when the church says that particular things are sins, for society to say that we should get the plank out of our eye, get rid of our hypocrisy, and then...really not do anything else! The thing we see in Jesus' story is this: we need to be aware of our blind spots and recognize them. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees were consumed with total obedience to the law. If you walked more than a mile from your home on the Sabbath, that was breaking the law (as they, not the Bible, defined it). If you didn't tithe a tenth of everything, down to the spices in your cabinet, you were breaking the law. These were the kind of specks Jesus was talking about, trivial things that didn't matter. But the Pharisees didn't realize that while they followed the letter of the law, they still let anger into their hearts. They were consumed with greed and lust and vengeance inside. Their understanding of the law never took into account a person's inner thoughts and heart, and that meant they had planks in their vision. In an upcoming passage in Luke, Luke 11:42, Jesus says as much. He says, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."

But what Jesus also shows us by the way He states this story is that we can eventually help others. When our foundation is in Christ, when we are rooted in faith and firm in our knowledge of God, He will help us see our blind spots and remove them from our vision. And when that's done, God will use us so that we can help others to see. In Christ, our vision is restored. If that's the case, then we need to make all the more certain that our foundation is indeed Jesus Christ.

Moving on...Jesus then starts talking about trees. He says something really simple. Good trees bear good fruit...that's why it's called a good tree! Same thing with a bad tree. A tree doesn't produce big juicy delicious apples right next to measly bitter ones. It doesn't because the same nutrients feed the whole batch. And each tree is known for its own fruit. Want apples, go to an apple tree. Want pears, go to a pear tree. But other than making us hungry, what is Jesus saying?

He tells us. The good person has good things stored deep down inside, and you can tell who a person is by that person's actions. Same with a bad person. Their fruit is their deeds. And when we think about it long enough, we realize that once again, Jesus is talking about foundations. What is it that makes a good tree? I'm sure that an arborist could tell us all the details. I'm sure there are different kinds of genetic structures involved. But what I do know is that when you plant a sapling, you've got to plant it in the right place. You've got to give it the right foundation. It needs everything that the soil can give it. Without that foundation, a tree is never going to produce good fruit, no matter how good the tree could be. You can plant a tree in rock, and unless the roots can find soil somewhere, no matter how much rain it gets and how much attention it's given, that tree is never going to grow and never going to produce fruit. The foundation makes all the difference. In the same way, the person that Jesus considers "good" has to be someone founded in the soil of the Heavenly Father, someone who learns from God and listens to the words of Christ and puts them into practice. We are to be rooted in Jesus, who is our foundation.

And then Christ makes us step back for a minute and analyze just what it means to believe in Him. He says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and yet don't do what I've taught you to do?" This is the place where the rubber meets the road. Jesus' question makes a lot of sense. The word Lord in Greek, *kyrios*, is the word that a servant used for his master or a soldier used to address his king or high-ranking superior. The word expects obedience. The word implies that whatever the *kyrios* says will be done by the person under him. That person has control and power. Jesus is saying, "If you call me Lord, you better mean it!" It's easy for us to love Jesus as Savior. It's easy to love Him as the one who frees us from sins and loves us and cares for us and gave His life as a ransom for us. But the question that we ask those who want to be baptized, those who want to become a part of the church, is this: "Who is your Savior and Lord?" Salvation is a free gift to those who call Jesus both. This causes us a lot of problems because it makes us have to look at our foundations all the more closely. A lot of us believe that we are rooted in Jesus because we have come to think of Jesus as Lord. Our brains have wrapped around enough of the gospel to say, "OK, I believe it in my mind and maybe even my heart." But the true test of belief is action. What is the proof of our belief that we need gasoline in our cars for them to run? We go to Speedway and fill up the tank! Now we think that's obvious because you very quickly learn when you're a young driver that if there's no gas in the car, you're not going anywhere. Or think of it this way...most of us, at one point in time, have fallen in love. We're sure of it because our stomachs get butterflies and our head gets light when that special someone is around. But how do you prove that love? You do something about it! You buy the person a card or a gift or you ask them to the movies or show them somehow that you care about them. Infatuation can cause all those feelings too, but it can't be love unless it's put into action. That's what Jesus is saying here...his foundation requires action.

This is what makes Jesus' story about the two houses so fascinating. It's not surprising that somebody who builds on a rock is going to have a house that will last and that somebody who builds on sand or dirt or anything unstable is going to have a home that washes away the moment the Clinton River floods. What is surprising is that the firm foundation is the practice of Christianity. Both of the men in the example hear Jesus. They may even believe Jesus to be telling the truth. But one acts on it and one doesn't. That's the only difference...acting on the truth Jesus tells.

Now this doesn't mean that salvation comes from action. Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that faith is what saves us, not works, and the faith we have itself is a gift from God to us. Nothing we can do can make God love us and save us. He already loves us and wants us to come to Him through the gift of His Son. But saving belief in His Son is made clear by what we think *and* what how we act. As James 2:18 says, "I will show you my faith by what I do." Our foundation in Christ is like that tree we were talking about. The perfect soil – the perfect rootedness in Christ – still needs the rain of obedient actions to make it fertile to grow a great tree.

So our question today is: how firm is my foundation in Jesus Christ? Am I pursuing Him in the words He left for us and inspired the biblical authors to write? Am I in prayer? Am I putting the things He taught in practice? If so, you should be seeing the fruit of it in your life, in the way you deal with your friends and family, in the people you come in contact with at work and at the store and at school. You will see it in your attitudes and in the way that Christ becomes a natural part of your conversations. Others will see it and mention it too. And that firm foundation will keep you strong when the storms of life come. If you don't like the answers you see when you ask yourself these questions, then remember that it's never too late to get that right foundation. If you are willing to be molded and shaped by the Holy Spirit and become more like God in your thoughts and actions, God will make sure that you are planted firmly in Him too. Whether you're just considering Jesus for the first time or coming to the conclusion after a long time that you need to make certain you're on the right foundation, it doesn't matter. God will lift you up and plant you in just the right way that you can be fruitful.

For the next couple of weeks, we're going to move ahead in our study of Luke. We're going to look at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem much later in His ministry. We'll see Him rejected and crucified and then resurrected. We're going to see how defeat turned into victory and death turned in to life. We will be seeing how Christ proved once and for all that He is our King...the Savior who came so that He could lead us to the Heavenly Father...the Lord who deserves our obedience because of all He has done for us. As we do, I encourage you to make sure that this wonderful God is the One who is the foundation of your life. Let's pray.