

LIFE ON THE ROCK
Matthew 7:21-29
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, June 1, 2008

Last Sunday's sermon was based on Jesus' teaching us, if we are ever tempted to worry about anything, we should consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field then realize if God takes care of their needs, then certainly God will take care of our needs too; so don't worry, "you of little faith"!

You may also remember that phrase "you of little faith" is a term of endearment reserved for Jesus' disciples. He never called Pilate or Herod by that pet name, because they refused to believe. Only those who trust Jesus and do their best with what little faith they have are privileged to be included in the "you of little faith" category.

But if last week's lesson was comforting, then this week's lesson, also from Christ's

Sermon on Mount, is equally disturbing. Last Sunday Jesus seemed to be holding our hands, reassuring us everything will be all right. This Sunday, Jesus may still be holding our hands, but he's also kicking us in the seat of the pants, warning us to get our acts together because maybe our salvation isn't in the bag after all.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father... On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you lawless ones.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Let's be very clear about this: Jesus' warning isn't directed towards non believing outsiders, but to believing insiders which should make you and me nervous.

In every Christian's spiritual life there should be an ebb and flow. Sometimes we go through dry wilderness periods other times we experience exciting growth spurts. But even when God seems absent, you can be sure God is present, growing and transforming us in his image, making us more like Christ inwardly and outwardly, that is God changes both our hearts and lifestyles, if we let him.

"If we let him." That's the key isn't it? When it comes right down to it, whether or not you are really and truly Christian depends on you and me. "Am I going to commit to Jesus, or am I content to rest on my laurels and coast?" Problem is, you can't coast forever. But if you listen carefully, even when you're dead in the water, you can still hear Jesus inviting you to come to him again and do your best with what little faith you have to "do" God's will.

You may be thinking, "But I am doing God's will, on Tuesday I visited the sick, on Friday I gave to the poor and on Sunday I went to church shouldn't all that count for something?"

I would like to say "yes," but apparently Jesus says "no."

"Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do the will of my Father." Obviously Jesus wants us to be consistent building our lives around doing God's will.

In the Lord's Prayer there's a phrase we usually gloss over: "...thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Be aware every time you pray this you are asking God to empower you to live your life in this world the same way the saints and the angels are living in heaven. You are telling God you intend to allow your will to be in sync with his will, which means you belong to God, not just part of you, but all of you. You can't be a half-time worker in God's kingdom because it's a full-time job. You are called to discipleship, not volunteerism; you can't come and go as you please, you're on call every minute of every day, not just when it's convenient or in your best interest.

Listen again to Jesus' closing comments. "Every one of you who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon a rock and the rains came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like the foolish man who built his house on sand, and the rain fell, and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell; and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-28)

The ones who reminded Jesus of all their good works and mighty deeds are the same ones who built their house on the flood plain. Let's take them at their word; they actively participated in the ministry of the Church, that's why they are protesting and basically saying, "Jesus you owe us big time for everything we did for you."

This scripture reminds us nothing we could ever do for God even comes close to what God in Christ accomplished for us. Even if you added up all the good deeds done by everyone who ever lived, it still wouldn't equal Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Good works don't earn salvation. That's one reason why Jesus was so frustrated with the Pharisees. They did plenty of good works, but they fell into the same trap we do. Like them we can use our good deeds to feel good about ourselves and maybe even superior to everyone else.

So, are we not supposed to do good works for our neighbors in need? Of course not. Being a servant, doing for others is essential. Then what does Jesus want from us?

Listen again to what Jesus said, "...be like the man who built his house on the rock."

I could give you a long list of celebrities whose lives are a disaster because they built their houses on the flood plain and when the storms hit they reaped the whirlwind. Under their mug shots could be the warning, "Don't let this happen to you!"

But before we get too smug we should ask ourselves, "Where did I build my house, on the sand or the rock?"

That rock of course is Jesus. Not just his teachings, but Jesus himself. Jesus is the rock you should base your life on. Only Jesus brings salvation. You cannot save yourself; your good deeds can't earn your way into his kingdom. Only through Jesus can you do on earth, as it is in heaven, and love God, your neighbor and yourself.

In just a few minutes we will celebrate the body and blood of Christ. In some wonderful mystical way our Lord's Table becomes the bridge between heaven and earth. Here we meet Jesus as we remember his great and terrible sacrifice that enables us to call God our Father and Jesus our Brother.

Maybe this week's scripture is a lot tougher on us than last week's, even still, the message is the same, don't worry, trust God and live to the fullest, both now and forever.

Let us pray.