

Our foundation is Jesus Christ
Matthew 5:38-48; 1 Corinthians 3: 10, 11, 16-23
February 20, 2011

¹⁰ *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.*” (1Cor. 3) I enjoy watching a myriad of programs on HGTV. *Holmes on Homes* is one of the many programs I enjoy. This program is a show **about folks who have had renovations begun on** their home that end in a nightmare. Either the builders flee, taking their money and not completing the work, or the contractors hired charge double for work that is unsafe and unsightly, or there have been times when the homeowner discovers part of the work does not meet code and when they complain to the contractor they are met with, “So sue me if you don’t like it.” In comes Mike Holmes to the rescue. He identifies for the homeowners not only the dangers of what can be seen, but he begins to tear away at what is there until he gets **to the foundation, the bare bones** of the structure, to make sure that the house is at least structurally sound. Once all the dangers and missteps are identified, then Mike and his crew begin to repair the damage that was done by shoddy, uncaring, ill equipped contractors the homeowner has hired. There have been times when Mike and his crew have even had to re-lay foundations that are discovered to have been poured improperly **or that have begun to crumble after years of neglect**. This show is a reminder of the care that must be taken when hiring a contractor or a builder. It frequently is also a reminder that proper care must be taken with the foundation if the structure is going to hold up.

As we read Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, and to us today, we find that he is speaking to folks who are arguing over which builder is best. Here the metaphor for **“builder” is a reference to those who shared the message of Jesus the Christ**. For the people of Corinth that was Apollos, Paul, and Peter (Cephas). The people of the church in Corinth were now bickering among themselves as to who was a better deliverer of the message, who was the best builder. They had become distracted by

the messengers and forgot who the message was all about, Jesus. While the builders **sought to add to the faith lives of the people of Corinth**, they found that the people were placing more emphasis on their gifts of eloquent speech and not looking at the gifts and graces the Spirit of God had given them to strengthen their faith. They were not seeking to build a relationship with Jesus, but were seeking to idolize Paul, Peter, and Apollos. Paul is trying to **correct them here so as to get them, and us, refocused** on the life and teachings of Jesus. As people of faith, Paul says to us, “¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3)

Paul is not only trying to get us to focus on Jesus, but he is reminding us that it is God who dwells within us: “¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that **God’s Spirit dwells in you?** ¹⁷... **God’s temple is holy, and you** are that temple.” (1 Cor. 3) How many of you fully understand and believe that? God dwells within each of us. Sadly, in our society of instant gratification and easy answers, thank you Google, people have relegated God to being some other worldly figure that is present in our lives only when we call for God to come. We are engrossed in our own mantras of “**What about me?**” or that classic, “**I did it my way.**” “*For many of us in the West, God is no longer in the center of our lives (the foundation). God is not a ‘given,’ in the sense that we feel an obligation to account for our lives to a supreme power. In our age, the ‘self’ is now central, and God and faith become important insofar as they help us manage our lives. God has been put in [God’s place,] so to speak.*”¹ Paul is saying to **us today that God, in Christ Jesus, is not just** present to help us cope with life when we face an illness, setback or suffering. Rather, Christ Jesus is to be the foundation from which we live our lives.

Jesus also speaks to the importance of his presence in our lives. He says to us, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear **much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.**” (Jn. 15:5) “In other words, stay connected to me, and you will bear fruit. If you get severed from me, you won’t bear fruit. The fruit of the Christian faith does not come full-blown out of

¹ Mark Tranvik. Commentary on Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23. Working Preacher.com

nowhere. It comes out of a branch that is connected to Jesus Christ. Less a church's foundation is Jesus Christ, there is no substance, no power. It is sound and fury. It is chaff."² Let us remember **that we are the church, we are members of Christ's body**, we are the branch, and we need to rediscover Jesus in our lives.

In a clergy meeting this past week these questions were asked, "How does your church differ from the Rotary, YMCA, or the country club? Can Jesus be found in the hearts and lives of the people or is your church really just a civic group that gets together on Sunday mornings?" To rediscover Jesus is to rediscover what it means to **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"**; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Lk. 10:27) To rediscover Jesus is to ignite within us the spirit of God that dwells inside of us, so that we can live into and carry out God's message of hope and love to a sin sick and broken world. To rediscover Jesus is to rediscover what it means to feed the poor, cloth the naked, and set the oppressed free. To rediscover Jesus means rediscovering what **it means to seek justice and equality for all of God's children**. To rediscover Jesus is to understand the call for us to visit the sick and those who are imprisoned. In rediscovering Jesus we discover that he is our foundation, yet we are the builders of our faith.

As the builders of our faith we must not only give attention to our relationship with our foundation, but we must choose wisely how we are going to strengthen and care for **the edifice of our faith**. **Are we going to use shoddy materials?** Are we going to only give God the time that we have left over in our day or are we going to awaken each morning, say a prayer of thanks that God has awakened us, and ask God to walk with us throughout our entire day? A popular tale in the South tells the story of a builder who was contracted to build a home by a friend who was a wealthy investment banker. The builder was so impressed that his friend wanted input on where the bedrooms **should go and what size the rooms should be**. The builder was asked questions about the entire design and layout of the house, including what

² Rev. William L. Self. Swimming to the Deep End of the Pool. www.goodpreacher.com

he would change. So the investment banker took his advice and said, “Okay, this is how the house is to be built. Cost is not an option, the sky is the limit.” Well, the builder decided along the way that he would cut corners. After all this guy was wealthy and was **probably only going to live in this house 5 years at most**, so the builder bought second hand materials while charging full price to his friend. He patched and painted over all the imperfections so when you looked at the structure it looked beautiful, but underneath all the paint and plaster lurked the truth. On the day of the big unveiling, the builder’s friend came to walk through the house and **complimented him on the work he had done. As they were leaving** the house the builder noticed his family standing outside. Puzzled he looked to his friend who handed him the keys to the house and said to him, “we have been friends for many years and I knew that you would put your best into this house because of our friendship. The truth is, this **is your new home. I know that you and your family** will enjoy it for many years to come.” The builder had taken short cuts, he was dishonest and deceitful out of a desire to please himself and had given no care as to who would be living in the very home he had constructed. He had no idea that the house he was building was for him and his family.

My sisters and brothers, how are you building upon the foundation that is Jesus **the Christ? How are you caring for your relationship** with Jesus? It is in the building up of our faith life that we must be intentional and take great care not only for ourselves, but also so that we have space to care for others along the way. I know that some of you are asking the question, “Why should I try to build a life upon a foundation of Jesus Christ, when it seems as though he has forgotten me?” I say to you that Jesus has not forgotten **you. The spirit of God dwells within you. We all** have hurts, pains and trials in this life. Jesus walked this earth, lest we forget. He was not born to wealthy parents, and he was a carpenter by trade in the heat of the Middle East. Jesus was ridiculed and had several attempts made on his life prior to his crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus was spat upon and beaten. So, who better to **understand the bumps and bruises of this** life than one who endured them himself? We are not promised this life is going to be easy, but we are promised that we do not

go through it alone. The gospel message challenges us to live into our humanity and there are many around us who **would have us to believe that we are foolish** when we could simply go our own way and have things but no substance to our lives. The building up of our faith is going to include a few chipped bricks here and there, but the cornerstone that the builders rejected, the vine, our foundation remains with us, shoring us up.

Jesus Christ changes lives. He is the vine, we are the branches. While we might think we can do it our way, we quickly discover that to be a hollow existence. A life lived out in human wisdom alone is a life filled with things, but has no substance. It cannot be sustained. **When we rediscover Jesus, our lives** and our beliefs will be strengthened and in turn so will our community. Let us choose with care how we are going to build upon our foundation. To build upon the foundation of **Christ, is to have life and life everlasting**. Amen