



**June 1, 2008**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Exodus 15:22-25a, 16:1-3, 9-21

Matthew 7:1-2, 7-8, 24-29

## “Wise and Foolish Builders”

My husband and I purchased a house in Portage, Wisconsin last September. We plan to move there when we both retire. It has been an adventure- dealing with all the little quirks and needs as they arise.

The lower level of the house was unfinished. Gilles and I decided we could finish it ourselves, with the help of family. First we stained the concrete floor- much cheaper than carpeting or putting down tiles. It looked really nice. Then, our younger son and a son-in-law hung the drywall, taped and applied a first coat of drywall mud. We sanded it, and applied a second coat. At this point Gilles and I began talking about paint, and doing the wood framing around the windows, hanging doors etc. We were advised to check into the cost of having it all done, rather than doing it ourselves, and I am so glad we did. It was not hugely expensive, and we learned a couple things. First, the second coat of drywall mud we'd applied was way too heavy and needed to be corrected a bit. Then all the painting was done. It looked really nice. Then the wood trim, doors etc. were completed. At this point we realized how sad the place would have looked if we had done the wood framing around windows, doors etc. You have to make the corners meet exactly--- given the fact Gilles and I weren't so successful even with drywall mud, I hate to think what the wood trim would have looked like! It was worth the extra money to have it done right.

Building and finishing a house requires knowledge and careful work.

Jesus figured most people know that. So, he told a story about house building, included in our gospel reading for today.

What's this story about? Obviously, it's not a LITERAL directive from Jesus. People generally know you need a proper foundation under a house. We wouldn't actually build a SHED on sand, let alone a HOUSE.

So, what's this about? Jesus is describing to us how to BUILD A LIFE. He's teaching us how to build a life that is abundant, faithful, and rewarding. He's giving us the foundation for that life. How do we build on ROCK? Jesus says we're to put his words into practice- that is the firm foundation for our lives. Specific instructions from Matthew 7 include:

- *Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged and the measure you give will be the measure you get.*
- *Ask and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.*

To build on Christ's rock, we need to have specific attitudes and reject other attitudes. Attitudes don't seem like much- just some vague feelings buried deep inside us. Attitudes don't appear to have a lot of power. Attitudes are often unconscious - we're oblivious to them as they percolate and bubble inside us. But here Jesus is teaching us that ATTITUDES are the BEDROCK (or lack of it) beneath the realities of our lives.

Jesus teaches us:

- to reject critical and judgmental attitudes
- to cultivate an attitude of trust in God.

According to Jesus, what would a foolish builder look like? A foolish builder embraces critical and judgmental attitudes and rejects an attitude of trust in God. The story of Exodus in the Old Testament has some great examples of this.

The Hebrew people had lived in slavery in Egypt for generations. The harsh demands of their owners, as well as the persecution and violence directed against them had been increasing year by year, month by month, day by day.

God raised up a liberator for the Hebrews: Moses. Through miraculous means Moses was successful in achieving their escape from Egypt into the wilderness.

How did these folks respond to their hard-won freedom?

- They grumbled and complained;
- They were critical of Moses and their leaders, judging them incompetent;
- They whined and moaned; they said they'd have done better to die in Egypt where at least there was food, rather than to die of hunger in the wilderness-specifying to Moses: "you have brought us out into this wilderness to KILL this whole assembly with hunger."
- They were FOOLISH BUILDERS ON SAND.

Friends, what are the choices before us in life? Jesus teaches:

- Rains come down.
- Floods come.
- Winds blow and beat against us.

WE HAVE NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER.

These are our choices:

- 1) We can follow the example of the Hebrews Moses led in the wilderness-complaining, discontent with life, grumbling, critical and judgmental, disappointed with God,

OR

- 2) We can turn to God in trust, coming to ASK, SEEK and KNOCK.

If we choose option 1, and grumble, criticize and complain, we send a stream of termites down into the foundation of our lives. This approach to life is evident in the response of one woman to a person who told her to "have a nice day". She looked the speaker in the eye and stated with venom: "***I have other plans.***"

If we choose option 2, we are promised God will meet us, provide for us, support us and love us. When we turn to God in trust, we are like the child in Jeannette Strong's remembrance:

***When my son was a toddler, washing his hair was always a problem. He would sit in the bathtub while I put shampoo on his hair. Then, when I poured on the water to make a lather, he would tip his head down so that the shampoo ran into his eyes, causing pain and tears. I explained that if he just looked straight up at me, he could avoid getting the shampoo in his face. He would agree; then, as soon as I started to rinse his hair, his fear would overcome his trust, and he***

*would look down again. Naturally the shampoo would run into his face again, and there would be more tears.*

*During one of our sessions, while I was trying to convince him to lift up his head and trust me, I suddenly realized how this situation was like my relationship to God. I know God is my Father, and I'm sure He loves me. I believe that I trust Him, but sometimes, in a difficult situation, I panic and turn my eyes away from Him. This never solves the problem; I just become more afraid, as the "shampoo" blinds me. ...*

*Often in the Bible, we are told to lift up our head to God when problems come. He knows how to protect us if we remember to listen to Him. Now, when I find myself in a situation where it would be easy to panic, I picture my son sitting in the bathtub, looking up at me, learning to trust me. Then I ask God what I should do. Sometimes the answer may seem scary, but one thing I'm sure of—He'll never pour shampoo in my face!*

As we live our lives, we actually BUILD our lives.  
We have a choice: To build our lives on sand or rock.  
We choose the attitude that creates the foundation for our building.

Which will it be? Grumbling, complaining, judging? Living on the shifting sands of our cranky attitudes?  
Or will we LOOK UP to find all that we need in the God who is ever with us?  
Friends, let's build our lives on ROCK. Cultivate an attitude of trust. Trust God. He is there. Look up!!

(Invite all to take a rock with them- to remind us of the solid foundation of God's promises to love us and care for us, no matter what.)