

instead of writing a country song about what was lost he wrote a hymn about Jesus and his great work of salvation. For this was Spafford's foundation, his hope, and his peace.

What does Jesus have to do with what he is going through? Everything. Because Jesus was his sure and certain hope that what was lost was not lost at all. His grief was real – the horror of the circumstances overwhelming – but the Lordship of Jesus was fully intact, and the grace of Jesus was at work even in the most tragic of circumstances.

But what about you? What foundation are you building upon? It's really very straight forward. There are two kinds of people – one is considered wise, and one is considered foolish. There are only two kinds of foundations – one is on the rock and the other is on sand. There are two kinds of destinies, one will stand forever and the other will come down with a great crash.

But I know what someone will say. "Well, thank you very much, this has all been very interesting, but I'm doing just fine. Business is okay, my health is getting better since I took up exercising again, my investment portfolio is getting better now that interest rates are up and I'm looking forward to that trip next week that will take me somewhere sunny and warm.

And so, he gets up in the morning, and with coffee and muffin in hand he heads to his car and on the drive into the office he remembers that he was supposed to call his doctor's office about the results of the test. No big deal – he's had these tests a number of times before. It's all very perfunctory.

And as he dials and turns down the car radio, he notices just the finest of drops of rain beginning to fall on the windshield.

"Please hold" says the voice on the other end of the line, the doctor would like to speak to you". ...the rain is beginning to get heavier. He turns on the wipers.

"Yes, Mr. So and So, I've taken a look at your results. I think it would be helpful to have you come in as soon as possible." ...The rain is getting heavy – kind of hard to see with the wind blowing across the road. "Oh...well, I'm heading away on vacation...can it wait?" "We will book you in for the day you get back."

Now the wind and the rain is too much –he pulls over to the shoulder – he can't see even a foot in front of him. Now what? The ground has shifted below your feet. Now the things that mattered most seem trivial at best. There's no foundation – there's no way to deal with this...it's too late.

In time relationships seem to shift too, people who were always there before can't seem to look you in the eye, they don't know what to say. All those things that used to dominate your thoughts and your plans seem so trivial and unimportant. All that stuff in the garage that you were going to get around to making into something seems like just a pile of junk.

Jesus says it's in these moments, that come out of nowhere, that the foundations seem so very important.

For the last three months we've been parsing Jesus' words – considering what it means to take up residence in God's kingdom which is not yet but is surely and steadily on its way. For three months you have heard what it means to be counted among those who live today in that eternal realm Christ will usher in.

And on this final Sunday Jesus says to us, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall..."

And then he says, "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

And then it would appear that Jesus just walked off. On to the next destination where we would again share this kingdom message for all who were willing to listen and obey.

People were astonished. They were amazed. They'd never heard anything like it before. It was like spoke with an authority that was not of this world. But the question is...what will you do about it?

May all those with ears to hear, hear the Word of God. Thanks be to God, Amen.

## ***"Sermon on the Mount: What You're Built Upon"***

*October 22nd, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: 7:24-29*

*By Rev. Mike Putnam*

**B**ack when we were doing our homework for our sanctuary renovation, one of the places our designer sent us was to the Belleville home show.

There were some new screen technologies on display, and it was a good place to talk to the vendor and check out our options. We wanted a projector screen that would be clear even in our bright sanctuary space and there was a new product available, and we wanted to see it in action.

At the show, two whole hockey rinks were chock a block full of home entertainment systems, in floor heating options, hot tubs, fancy roofing products, kitchen cabinets, barbecues and high-end bathroom fixtures.

But nowhere, as far as I can remember, were any fancy new foundation options. Foundations aren't very sexy. You need one. So, you get one. And then you move on to debating the style of the drapes and the colour of the kitchen cabinets.

But this morning Jesus wants us to talk about foundations. And Jesus knows a bit about this. Afterall, he's a carpenter. But don't think Gibbards furniture think of someone like Dirk Jonkers or Peter Wionzek. Think of someone pouring foundations, throwing up framing, nailing down shingles. Jesus was a builder.

And so, Jesus knows what he's talking about here this morning. Never mind the fixtures – we need to talk about your foundation.

Jesus is once again masterfully taking ordinary things and using them to teach us about the eternal ones. Last week Jesus talked to us about the narrow gate and the broad road to teach us about citizenship in the Kingdom that God will one day make. Today, Jesus is talking to us about housing construction to

help us think about living in that kingdom now.

And so, he draws us a picture of two customers in the market for a house. One (Jesus calls him the wise man) has a geological survey done, they dig down to the bedrock and it is there that he builds his foundation. It's costly, its time consuming and the whole project is held up to do this... Is it worth it?

The second builder (Jesus calls him the foolish man) is in a hurry. He's trying to save a buck. He and his wife are heading to the Belleville home show to pick out the kitchen cabinets and a hot tub for the back deck. They don't have any interest in concrete – just pour the foundation and get on with it.

And then, what happens? Well, what always happens. "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house....and it fell with a crash."

It's the rain and winds that clearly shows us that not all houses are built the same. They may be the same design, they may have the same fixtures, they may both be magazine worthy. But one has a rock foundation and the other has sand. The moral of the story? Foundations matter.

When you look at the lives of two people you really have no way of knowing what's below the surface. What you notice is how people dress up their lives – their activities, their passions, their outward appearances. And who's to say what is right. You live your life and I'll live mine. Who are we to judge? But then the inevitable happens. The rains come down, the streams rise, the winds blow, and our house is put to the test.

Because here's the reality, we all build our lives upon something as its foundation. We're all building our lives on something – but most of us don't give it a lot of thought. Until...it's too late.

The loss of loved ones, the diagnosis of an illness, personal betrayals, financial

reversals, and moral failures undermine the foundations of our lives. Our meaning making attempts suddenly seem flimsy and futile.

It is then that we discover that what seemed permanent and stable is way more fragile than we thought. Life goes from our oyster to being tragic in a flash.

The question we want to answer is how can we mitigate this? Can we buy insurance? Can we diversify our portfolio? Can we assemble just the right collection of friends and family to help us through whatever may come? Or, purge our friends and family list so we don't have to deal with other people's drama?

But what about faith? What role does faith play in all of this? Who is this God you claim to believe in? And what difference does He make in those moments when the rain comes?

Samuel G. Freedman, a columnist for The New York Times wrote after the Newtown shootings in 2012 that the humanists seemed particularly absent and silent after the crisis. Suddenly the world became very religious.

They became religious in their vocabulary and religious in their ceremonies. Newtown is not a particularly religious community (it's nowhere near the Bible belt). And yet, every single victim's family opted for a religious funeral. A black Christian youth group was brought in from the deep south to sing "Amazing Grace" and President Obama was invited to speak at a memorial.

What did he speak about? Political reform and policy? Did he stay in his political lane? No, he basically preached a sermon quoting extensively from 2 Corinthians.

Friedman noted how startling this was. In an increasingly secular society, that seeks to mute religion in everyday life, when the rain fell and the winds blew, suddenly everyone seemed so very religious. Friedman left us with one prickly question: where were the humanists in the days after the shooting in Newtown?

And that's the thing I've noticed. So often when tragedy strikes our words of self-sufficiency fail us, our sentimental ideas about making our own meaning simply crumble.

And so, this morning Jesus wants us to know that the kingdom of God isn't just a future reality toward which we are moving, but the kingdom of God is a reality on which you can build your life upon today. How do we do that? Jesus tells us it's a matter of "lordship" and a matter of "grace."

First, we must make Jesus the Lord of our lives. He says, "The man who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." It's one thing to believe certain things, but it's a whole other thing to put yourself under the authority of the one in whom you believe.

But the reality is we all put ourselves under someone's or something's authority all the time. We all are subjects living under the reign of something. Whether it's the kids hockey schedule, our own work schedule, the demands of family life or the need to make more money to afford all the things we buy, or it's the things we buy in order to convey just the right look. The great theologian Bob Dylan got it right – Everybody serves somebody.

And so often this is what we do too. We rest our whole identity on one thing, or activity or person. But that's a problem. It's one thing to love someone and get a lot of joy and happiness from that relationship. But if that person breaks up with you or dies or moves away, and you suddenly lose your desire to live, it means you've given that person too much glory. You're trying to put too much weight upon them.

And that's why making Jesus the Lord of your life may be your healthiest option. Because when you live your life first and foremost for him, he cannot let you down. When every other possession, relationship and idea is filtered first through who Jesus is, then it puts everything else in its rightful place.

When Jesus has lordship over your life then your relationships, your possessions, your greatest dreams become subservient to the One who can never die, who can never become weak, who will never change his mind about you.

But why do today what I can do tomorrow? I mean, we're basically talking about what will happen when we die, right? And I don't plan to die anytime soon. But here's the thing: the forecast is for rain and for wind.

Jesus warns us, "In this life you will have trouble...". He isn't vague about this. He doesn't candy coat it. There's going to be those days, and weeks, and seasons of life that seem to blow your hopes and dreams all over the place. But Jesus says, "...but fear not because I have overcome the world."

So the first thing we need is to live under the lordship of Jesus Christ – the alpha and the Omega, he's the first and the last, he's the beginning and the end. He is eminently qualified to be your Lord.

But the second thing we need is Jesus' grace. Build your house on the grace of God. Jesus says, "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand...it fell with a great crash."

And that's the end of the story, right? You get what you deserve. Well, actually no, because God is gracious. So many of us live building our lives on foundations of our own efforts. Does God say, "Well, to heck with you...you're on your own!" No, because God is gracious.

God allows us to chase after the wind, as Ecclesiastes puts it. And he allows us to find out for ourselves that this is basically "Meaningless" as Ecclesiastes concludes. But that's not the end of the story, it's just part of the process.

This is why Paul writes to the Philippian church, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things."

See, Paul once built his life on his own record, his own worthiness, his own reputation. He was a Pharisee's Pharisee. But it wasn't until he lost it all that he experienced the surpassing power of the Grace of God – and it totally realigned his heart and his mind.

And so often it is the wind and the rain that brings us back to God. When pain and suffering come, we see most clearly that we are not in control of our lives, and we never really were.

C.S. Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." It is by grace that God uses wind and rain to bring us to the realization that we need to build on something more stable than the sands of our circumstances.

And for me, whenever I think of the challenges of my life, I find the story of Horatio Spafford to be most helpful. He was an American lawyer who in 1871 lost everything in the great Chicago fire. Two years later, Anna, his wife and their four daughters boarded a ship to cross the Atlantic Ocean to England.

The ship hit another ship and began to sink. As it was sinking, Anna got the four little girls together and prayed. The ship went under, and they were all scattered into the waves, and all four children were lost at sea.

Anna was taken to England where she cabled her husband just two words: "saved alone."

Spafford boarded a ship to bring his wife home, and while on board, somewhere near the place where his daughters were lost, he began to write a hymn. "It is well with my soul...When peace, like a river..."

Here's what this means. In his greatest moment of grief, a man who had lost everything was able to still find peace. But