

Pastor Mike has been preaching this series on “I love Sundays.” We have been looking at what significance Sunday worship has in our lives. Every week in worship we look at what Jesus Christ has done for us. And not only do we look at what Jesus did for us, we also look at Jesus’ instruction and example for how we should live our lives. So today we look at Luke chapter 6, beginning at verse 46. Luke 6 contains a large section of Jesus’ teachings and we are looking at just one of these this morning. Beginning at verse 46 Jesus said this to his disciples:

**Luke 6:46-49**

**46** "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

**47** As for those who come to me and hear my words and put them into practice, I will show you what they are like.

**48** They are 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.

**49** But those who hear my words and do not put them into practice are 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."

This passage that I just read is a very short parable, and very to the point. And I know that almost all of you have heard this passage before. For those of you my age or older that attended vacation Bible school or Sunday school as children, you probably remember the song we used to sing about this passage. “The wise man built his house upon a rock...” And so forth. But as familiar and possibly nostalgic this passage is, do we really listen to what it has to say? There is actually a lot here to consider in this short parable.

I want to look at the builders of these two houses side by side, because there are a lot of similarities between the two. First of all, both builders heard Jesus’ words. In both cases Jesus refers to “those who hear my words.” This is one of the important things we do on Sunday mornings; we hear the words of our Lord. We read them, we proclaim them, and we celebrate them in sacraments on a regular basis. Hearing the Word of the Lord is the first step towards living the life God plans for us. We need to listen to God’s instruction.

I recently heard this story about a preacher that was getting annoyed with folks who slept through worship. There was one gentleman in particular that would sleep through the worship service every Sunday. So the preacher decided it was time to do something about it. So the next Sunday, just as the preacher stood up to preach, he noticed the man was already comfortably asleep in his pew. So, the preacher asked his congregants to please stand if you want to go to heaven. Everyone stood except the sleeping man. There were snickers and a few gasps, the guy kept on sleeping. The preacher had everyone sit back down, and then with a bang of his fist on the pulpit and with a loud voice the preacher said, “Stand up if you want to go to hell!” The surprise noise roused the sleeping man; he stood, and he looked around seeing he was the only one standing, and the man said, “Preacher, I don’t know what we’re voting on, but it looks like it is just you and me are the only ones for it.”

Now hopefully no one here is sleeping. But unlike the preacher in the joke, I will not get annoyed or personally offended if you sleep in worship. This is not about me or my preaching. My main concern is that you hear God’s words...that you listen to Jesus’ instruction. We need to know what God has to say for our

lives. God is the author and the creator. God is the one that knows the design and plans for our lives. Living without God's Word is like buying a complicated new gadget without getting the instruction manual. We need to hear scripture and commune with God in prayer. We need it, just as the men in this parable needed it.

So both men heard Jesus' words. The next thing these two builders have in common is that they both build houses. They both build lives. They are both busy in the process of living life. And in the case of the lives of both builders, storms come. In both sections Jesus says "a torrent struck the house." He does not say if a storm strikes, he says when. In both cases struggle, challenge, a torrent strikes their lives. In my experience as a chaplain I have gotten asked the same question many times. The question goes like this: "How could God let this happen?" None of us likes it when bad things happen and we seem to live with this unrealistic expectation that bad things won't happen. But Jesus himself says here "when the flood struck...when the torrent came." Jesus lived in the world that we live in. He knew that life would not always be smooth. He knew that bad things can and do happen. He doesn't say that God prevents life from throwing us challenges. However, he does note that there is a difference in how we weather challenges, based on following God's instructions.

So, both men hear Jesus' words, both men build houses, and both houses face stormy times. Now the contrast. What is different between these two builders? There are several differences and the first one is this: one puts the words that they hear from Jesus into practice and the other does not. I already mentioned that hearing the word of God is one of the important things we do on Sundays. We hear the words of Jesus in our scripture readings and Sunday school lessons and sermons. But what Jesus says here is that as important and necessary it is to hear his words, that is not enough. That is not the end point. Don't stop at hearing his words. The key difference between these two builders is that one puts the words he hears into practice and the other one does not.

This, putting his words into practice, this is what was driving Jesus nuts at the beginning of this passage. Did you hear the first line? Jesus says in verse 46; "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Sound familiar? How many of you are or have been parents? How many of you are or have been teachers? How many of you are or have been in leadership roles? Have you ever experienced people not doing what you say? Can you relate to Jesus' frustration? Being called by your title of parent or teacher or leader, and yet they don't do what you say? I don't really need to use an illustration here. All of us know what it is like to give good instruction and have that person ignore you in return. And this is where Jesus is with his disciples. They call him Lord. Lord in Greek is *kyrios*. It means supreme in authority. So they call him their supreme authority, but then they don't do what he says.

So how about us? Do we call Jesus Lord and then fail to put his words into practice? Do we hear his words and then not do them? We probably do this individually as well as corporately. Individually we probably all know of some of Jesus' teachings that we find hard to put into practice. Some of his teachings we think are great and see how they obviously make our lives or relationships better. But others, some of Jesus' teachings, are hard to do and we don't want to do them. If you can, take the time to read the teachings that preceded this parable. Read what Jesus was instructing the disciples to do when he got so frustrated that they weren't putting them into practice. Read Luke chapter 6 starting at verse 17 and see which of his instructions are hard for you. I can give you a few of my own. Verse 27 says "love your enemies." I don't find this one easy to put into practice. Move on to verse 37 and it says "do not judge." I don't know about you but I can easily lose count of how many times I am judgmental in just one day.

Jesus gives all these teachings and then he gives this parable of why we need to put them into practice. Why do we need to hear Jesus' words AND put them into practice? Well, the parable makes it clear. We need a foundation. We need to be firmly planted in Christ, and that happens through obedience to his Word. It is like the difference between have a foundation on rock or no foundation at all. And this is part of why Sundays are important. It is part of our foundation as Christians. You might be thinking to yourself, how does Sunday worship give me a better foundation? Specifically, how does going to church help me put Jesus' words into practice? Well, Jesus' greatest command was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And worshipping God is part of honoring that command. When you worship God, you are showing your heart of love for God. When you teach a Sunday school class or just participate in a Bible study or class, you are loving God with you mind. When you love others with your deeds in this church, you are using your strength to love God. So Sunday worship covers a lot of Jesus' instruction to love the Lord your God.

Jesus' other greatest command is to love your neighbor as yourself. And that is what the ministries of the church are designed to do. When we help with food pantry, our missionaries, Pamela's closet, dinner at Vinny's, dinner at RMH, Vacation Bible school, youth mission trips, all these are ways in which we are loving others in our community and beyond. So not only do you hear the words of Jesus when you participate in a church, but you also have the chance to put them into practice. Just the act of calling another member of the congregation to check on them, that is putting Jesus' words into practice. And this is why being part of a church community is so important.

And as this parable from Jesus states, putting Jesus' words into practice form a foundation for our lives. And I want to take a moment to examine what that foundation looks like. Because there are several features of the foundation that we gain from our Sunday worship. The first is the foundation of scripture, which I have already mentioned. Hearing scripture, the Word of God, is a critical part of our foundation of faith. Especially as Presbyterians, scripture is expected to be at the center of what we do. Have you ever looked at what the *Book of Order*, which is the governing document for our denomination, says about worship? In the first chapter on worship it says that quote "In Christian worship the people of God (1) hear the Word proclaimed, (2) receive the Word enacted in Sacrament, (3) discover the Word in the world, and (4) are sent to follow the Word into the world." Hear any repetition in there? The "Word"...right? It is stated over and over again. Scripture is the center of our worship. And thankfully because of that, being part of this church body will help make scripture a part of your personal foundation in Christ.

The original title Mike gave to this sermon was "Sundays make better families." He and I agreed to change this because everything we are reading this morning applies to all of us, not just those with children. However, the foundation of scripture is especially important if you are raising children. I was recently looking at a book by Larry Fowler's book titled *Rock –Solid Kids: Giving Children a Biblical Foundation for Life*, he writes this "The Word of God has to come first. Why do we start there? Because the word themselves are truth. Because they are from God. Start with Scripture. We must not only teach children about the Bible and how to apply the Bible, but we must also as first priority teach them the Bible." If you are raising children, scripture needs to be a big part of their foundation. How you start them off in this world matters and will affect the direction of their lives. Look at Eli and Peyton Manning. Two accomplished quarterbacks. Guess what their dad did for a living? Archie Manning was an NFL quarterback. Do you think he started them off early on football? You bet. So how you start your children off really matters. And the Bible needs to be a foundational

part of that. It actually needs to be a big part of all of our foundations. And Sunday worship, a place to read and study scripture, is where some of that foundation is laid.

Another part of the foundation that comes from the worship we do together here on Sundays is community/fellowship. Jesus talked to the disciples as a group, as a community of believers. His teachings and instructions were for a collection of people. We are meant to be in community as believers, not on our own. We are instructed to care for one another, encourage one another, reconcile with one another, be a community. All these instructions from Jesus come to us as a group. And when we are in community in the kind of relationships that are Christ-centered, we are the better for it. I can honestly say that it was the influence and care of Christian friends that helped me become a Christian, go into ministry, and turn around some of the things in my life that were not Christ-centered. Yes, reading scripture has been a big part of it, but relationships were just as important.

Lastly, part of the foundation you find on Sundays is the focus on God's relationship with us; the fact that we have a creator and a redeemer. Think about it, is there any place else you walk into in the course of a week where you are told that God loves you so much that he died for you? Where else do you walk into and get told you are forgiven? Do you get told these things at the grocery store or at work or at the gym? Or are you more commonly told to work harder and achieve more? On TV do you learn you are special and valued simply because you are created by God? Or do you constantly get the message that you are not good looking enough, not thin enough, or do not own enough stuff? Where else will your children hear that they are valued by God because he is a God of love and grace, not because of what they do right or wrong? Do they hear that from their friends at school? Do they get that message from textbooks? No. Sunday church is a unique place where we hear messages that we do not hear hardly anywhere else. And we need to hear these things from God. The world will not tell you these things. Our world is not focused on love, grace, forgiveness, and sacrifice. But our God is. And that is why our foundation has to be in Jesus Christ. Foundations in anything less do not stand the force of the storms of life. If your foundation is in money, or success, or your workplace, or in possessions, you will be let down. You will miss the better foundation, the love of God.

In October of 2012 what would become known as superstorm Sandy came ashore where we lived in New Jersey.



We stayed up all night watching the wind and rain blow everything down the street sideways. We had no phone, no power. We could not go anywhere because downed trees blocked every street. And so it was several days before we saw the pictures of the level of destruction less than five miles from our house. Little

did we know what our community would look like for the next several years. This is a picture of seaside.



That is a few miles from our house. Mark grew up going to that pier. The storm removed much of it. That is a rollercoaster in the ocean there. This is the bridge that I took to work every day for eight years.



The ocean created a new inlet during the storm, destroying about 40 houses that used to be next to this bridge. This is Tuckerton.



I was an intern at the first Presbyterian Church of Tuckerton at the time. The church is a few blocks from the right side of this picture. This was the community I was serving. Here are two pictures of homes in Tuckerton. Block after block looked like this.



Jesus' illustration in this parable is so effective. We all know what it looks like for a storm to come and hit something without a foundation. It's a disaster like those pictures. And Jesus says, that is US, you and I, if we do not hear his words and put them into practice in our lives. So that is what we do here on Sunday mornings. We hear his words, we worship and love God, and in this community of faith we have the opportunity to put Jesus' words into practice. At the beginning of this parable Jesus says to the disciples "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Let's not have this said of us. Let's be the community of faith, worshipping together, that will delight our God and give us the foundation we need to live life in this world. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.