

"Starting with a Solid Base"

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; Luke 6:46-49

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

July 24, 2016 – 10th Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald Botts

You'll probably remember some years back when Robert Fulghum wrote a best-seller titled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Among those things he learned there was to share everything, play fair, don't hit people, put things back where you got them, clean up your own mess, don't take things that aren't yours, and learn to say you're sorry. These are basic rules that Fulghum says you shouldn't forget.

It makes you wonder what the world would be like if everybody shared and took a nap each afternoon. The author reminds us, too, that we never outgrow our need for warm cookies and cold milk. The patterns that we acquire between the ages of 2 and 5 are most often the ones that will continue to serve us well throughout all of life.

The ideas in this book are not new. They don't originate with Robert Fulghum, with his kindergarten teacher, or even in the long history of education. They go back much farther, primarily to the teachings of faith.

Our Gospel reading for today makes just such a point about the importance of basics. Jesus has just called his twelve disciples, and you might say that they are in the "kindergarten" phase of their training. He is providing them with a foundation for faith and work, one which will guide them as they carry out his ministry.

Jesus makes the beatitudes prominent in his instruction, but he goes on to include much more in his teaching. He tells them not to be judgmental and to avoid the hypocrisy of criticizing others while being unaware of their own faults. He tells them to be spiritually productive, to put into practice what they know in their hearts.

In addition, he tells them to build their faith on a strong foundation, one that will carry them through the storms of life. Here he uses the analogy of a man who builds a house, who digs deeply to lay its foundation on rock. When a flood comes, as inevitably it will, the water might push against its walls but to no avail. It will not move because it has been built right and well.

Contrast this, he says, to a man who foolishly builds without a solid foundation. When the river comes out of its banks, the house is no match and will soon fall. Jesus says this is like the person who hears what he says, but doesn't really take it to heart. He makes no changes in his life and, therefore, fails to prepare himself for the future. He has nothing firm to build his life on. The key element is the foundation.

It's quite possible that Jesus was directly acquainted with the pyramids of Egypt. The Scriptures tell us about only a very limited span of his adult life, really just a few years in his late twenties or early thirties. It's certainly imaginable that he might have travelled as far as the Nile. At the least, he probably had heard of the pyramids for they were among the wonders of the ancient world.

Their magnificence and endurance was in their construction. It all went back to the carefully engineered base that served as a foundation. Think of a building 40 stories high, about the height of the Leveque Tower. That's how tall the Great Pyramid is. It's length and width is so immense that, were it hollow, you could get eight regulation football fields inside. Each of its four sides is 750 feet long, three are exact and the fourth is off only by a half inch.

Modern engineers, amazed by how the Egyptians erected something so marvelous and precise, believe the first step was to clear the sand and gravel down to the bedrock and then to create an absolutely flat foundation. Next, huge limestone blocks were put in place to form its four corners. After that they then had to then lay in two million more stones by hand until it was finished. Without the right start, however, it would have been a jumble at the end.

Closer to home Jesus would have been aware of the temptation to erect a house the "easy" way. In Palestine many streams beds go dry for at least half of the year. These beds are sandy and digging in them is no trouble at all. Therefore, a person could easily shovel out a foundation for a new home in such a place. Simply erect the walls and roof, and you'd be done.

Of course when the rainy season would return, and the dry beds would run again with water, the foolish builder would be evident. A house could have no chance against a swift current. Quickly all would be lost, no matter how fancy the structure above might have been. Jesus cautioned that you don't want to be like that with your life. "There's a better way and I'll show you," he said.

Foundations apply to people as well as to buildings. Whenever I reread this scripture I can't help but think of Jim. He came to live with us as a ten-year-old ward from the juvenile court. He had a history of school truancy and a conviction for shoplifting. He was the first of six young people who lived with us at various times in the big old parsonage in my first church call. Jim was young enough that he could almost have been my own son.

There were a number of factors that contributed to Jim's delinquency. Let me tell you just one, and that will probably be enough for you to have an understanding of his problems.

Jim was born into an unstable home. His mother was unable or unwilling to control her alcoholism. Before he started to school, Jim's parents split up and he went with his father. After a quick divorce and remarriage, the boy now found himself with his dad and step-mother.

This new relationship broke down, too. His dad also began to have financial problems about this time. He knew he couldn't take care of Jim alone. So after this divorce, the father left and Jim continued to stay with his step-mother.

Within the year she remarried, and now Jim was living with a step-mother and a step-father. Each of his natural parents were nearby, but neither had regular contact with him. So that was his situation when he came to live with us. School reports showed that Jim had an IQ of 135. He was too smart not to know that he was a perennial misfit in his home life, but not mature enough to understand that the fault didn't lie in him.

There was no stability in his life, and he truly believed that he was unlovable. And is it any wonder? His foundation was built on sand instead of rock. It changed whenever the winds of adversity blew. Those who had the responsibility of giving him a firm base in life proved unequal to the task.

“Look around at your life,” Jesus says, “and it's easy to feel overwhelmed. It's understandable to be disillusioned and to wonder if there is no place you can put your trust. Nothing may seem to work. Nothing may come up to its promise.

“But I will show you a better way; in fact, the only way. If you come to me and are ready hear my words, if you are prepared to give me your trust, if you are willing to act on what I tell you, then what you will find is what you've been looking for. It's right here and in front of you. It's yours for the asking. You don't have to look any further. I'll give you the foundation you're seeking.”

This is good news for the person who has been searching in vain for something to believe in. You know, there's a lot of persuasive folks out there saying to trust me, so you have to be careful to know the real from the sham. You have to know the one who has stood the test of time, who has the real answers from the bogus.

There's also an appropriate reminder here for the person who has already made a decision to follow Christ, but perhaps has strayed a bit over time. You have to have to stay in regular and continuing contact with Jesus if your full discipleship is to be realized. You've got to stay close to him or the path you desire to take will grow dim. You can't forget the one who is your foundation and still keep strong in faith.

To hear the words of Jesus and to act upon them are the two basic essentials to remember. It's plain and simple, but it's easy and hard at the same time.

Maybe we can create a new best-selling book of our own. We could surely use the money here at Highlands. Perhaps we can call it *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Sunday School*. And this shouldn't be all that hard to get together. All we've got to do is put this clever cover on any New Testament and we're done. You see, everything is spelled out there already. What really makes it work, though, is the response and that's something that only the reader can put into motion.