

A Sunday Devotional for People and Families at Home

The First Church of Evans

Week Thirteen - Sunday, June 14, 2020

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

Last weekend on Saturday morning, the governor let it be known that houses of worship could open in New York State "effective immediately". It was news we have wanted and prayed to hear for months, tempered by the fact that the precautions we still must take against the virus will make the worship we offer look and feel different than what we've ever done before. For three months, God has been teaching us that worship is a matter of the mind and the heart, that no distance can keep us from honoring God and loving each other if we set our hearts and minds to it. It can be work, but love never fails.

Call to Worship

Isaiah 2:1-4

"It shall come to pass that in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills.

And all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples come and say,

'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

For the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

God shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD."

An Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

You have made us, one and all, in your image whoever we are, wherever we're from. And when we put our faith in Jesus, your Spirit makes each of us your children, and he makes all of us together the temple in which he dwells. Forgive us when we fail to love and respect people made in your image, and teach to want your holiness and to welcome your presence; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Devotional

Matthew 5:14-18

Pastor Stephen Ridge

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to the whole house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Our Call to Worship was a vision seen by the Prophet Isaiah some 700 years before Jesus spoke of a "city set on hill" in the opening remarks of his Sermon on the Mount. There may have been a number of hilltop villages in old Israel in Jesus' day, but the "city set on a hill" that would have leapt to people's minds when Jesus said it was old Jerusalem, not just because it was Israel's capital since the days of David and Solomon, but more because Jerusalem was God's home town, the place where "the house of the LORD" had stood, on and off, for a thousand years.

So now here was Jesus, in a windswept meadow atop some mountain in Galilee, telling his disciples that they were "the light of the world", comparing them to that "city set on a hill" that "cannot be hidden". And I think in the back of Jesus' mind was Isaiah's prophecy that "in the last days...the mountain of the house of the LORD" would rise to a height never seen in old Israel's long history.

In fact, in Isaiah's day, Jerusalem would wind up surrounded and besieged by an Assyrian army numbering in the hundreds of thousands. It was in a dark and stormy time that God promised Isaiah that Jerusalem would rise to be "the highest of the mountains...in the last days". But how would that happen? How could that be? Jesus' answer was that Isaiah's prophecy would be fulfilled in and through the riff raff around him hearing his words. God would light up the disciples to shine like the gold candelabra had gleamed, brilliantly reflected off the gold-plated walls of old Israel's temple.

Empowered by God's Spirit, informed by Christ's gospel, their lives would shine in a way that old Israel's temple could only dimly foreshadow. And Jesus' challenge to the men and women gathered on that hillside was to simply, plainly let it happen. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

And the point here is not that living for Christ is without effort or rigor or duty. The boundaries taught in "the Law" will not be abolished. The zeal and obedience demanded by "the Prophets" will not "pass away", Jesus said. What Jesus would provide his disciples is a standing with his Father, a relationship with God in which we can dare to face what is wrong and to reach for what is right, knowing that in being wrong we have forgiveness and, in reaching for the right, we are not alone. The Spirit Jesus sent us would make our hearts his house, his sanctuary.

As enemy troops gathered around the city walls, Isaiah was allowed to see a future in which "the law would go out from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Without Christ, the Law is our enemy, judging and condemning us. With Christ, the riff raff on the hillside would make God's Law our friend, teaching hearts around the world the sort of beauty and balance and order that leads us toward peace and changes weapons into farm tools.

Offering

Proverbs 3:9,10

*Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce,
then will your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats overflowing with new wine.*

Thank you for the faithfulness you have shown Christ and his kingdom during this season. Please mail what your heart leads you to give to:
The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

(What follows is the script for the worship video we will offer this week via a link on our website:

TheFirstChurchofEvans.com. If you cannot access the video, you can still join us by reading and praying and singing through the printed Order of Worship that follows.)

Greeting and Prayer

Hymn

"The Solid Rock"

See Insert

Table Talk

Matthew 7:24-27

Elder and Properties Chair, Carl

Mende

*"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them
will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house,
but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.
And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them
will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.
And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house,
and it fell, and great was the fall of it."*

Our Scripture Lesson this morning falls at the very end of the Sermon on the Mount. The unifying theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the Kingdom of Heaven. The entire discourse provides ethical guidelines for life in the kingdom, but it does so within Jesus' relation to the Old Testament. As you read through it, you can see what occupied Jesus' attention.

So in verses 24 through 27, we see a story of two builders building for all intents and purposes identical houses. One is called wise and the other foolish. Note that the wise man and the foolish man were engaged in the same activity, building a house. They both accomplished from outward appearances the same result. However, we see that there was a big difference; the foundations were not the same.

The interesting thing is that from the outside the foundation is hidden in most houses. You can see the big, beautiful building sitting above it, but the foundation is underneath, out of sight. This image can be true of you and me also. What we show on the outside is not always what is hidden on the inside.

The land of Palestine is known for having torrential rains that can turn a dry wadi into a raging torrent of water. And it is only through storms like these that the quality of the two buildings are revealed. Jesus tells us that one was built on rock and the other on sand and, when the rains came, the house on the rock withstood the storm, but the house on sand crumbled.

Jesus said that *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them"* is like the wise man. The wise man built his house to withstand anything; he represents those who put Jesus' words into action. Merely hearing the word of God is not enough; we must be doers of the word. Those that are living the words of God daily are able to withstand the storms of life because their foundation is in Jesus. The Apostle Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 3: *"You are God's field, God's building...For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

The foolish man is *"everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them."* Note that it is not that he purposely set out to build a bad foundation, but rather that the foolish man didn't take the time to consider the foundation; he just neglected it. He represents those who pretend to have faith or who only have an intellectual commitment to the word of God rather than an active life of living by the word. They heard the word but didn't put it into practice. When the trials and storms of life come, their foundation doesn't last and their "faith" crumbles.

In the verse immediately preceding today's passage, Jesus speaks of false followers and says, *"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'"* Jesus is giving us examples of just how close to spiritual reality a person may come without ever knowing its true reality, because the "day" Jesus speaks about is the Day of Judgment, the day when we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

These verses emphasize the demand for submission to the lordship of Jesus. It is He who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. It is He who warns us that the alternative to obedience and righteousness is eternal judgment.

This may sound harsh and hopeless, but it isn't; we do not have to fear. If we build our foundation on the rock, if we believe in Him, if we become active doers of His words we have nothing to fear. Follow Jesus in every aspect of your life and you will be able to say as Solomon wrote in Proverbs 10:25,

*"When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more,
But the righteous is established forever."*

Prayer *Matthew 7:7* “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.”

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to the recent racial conflict and civil unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic, most recently the family of Ann McCaulley-Small. Please also pray for Richard Pearson in the hospital and Eric DePan and Jerry Galfo as each of them recovers at home from surgery.

Hymn

“Sanctuary”

See Insert

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace."

With love from The First Church of Evans, till our eyes meet and our hands touch again.