

June 7, 2020

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Reading: Deuteronomy 11.18-21, Matthew 7:24-29

The Message: "Building According To Code"

[Video](#)

What we put into our minds affects how our lives unfold in powerful ways.

Last year, at our garage sale, I noticed a huge number of self-help books. I wondered how many of those books really fulfilled their promise to change people's lives? Perhaps if they had, the owners would have given them to loved ones rather than given them away.

I suspect that the self help movement has waned. It is like shifting sand – one minute it's don't eat fat; then don't eat carbs, respect your kids; then tough love parenting ...

In the present context, if we have learned anything, I hope it is that we can't live like we are islands -- even alone, perhaps especially right now, physically isolated, we yearn for connectedness. What we have learned is that

- People need others.
- We need neighbours,
- we need friends, we need families,

But we can't have a big enough family, or a big enough set of friends to survive in this world.

- We need strangers -- all those shoppers and deliverers, hospital workers, garbage collectors and on it goes who have achieved a new status by doing their jobs in dangerous times.)

We need strangers. People who look different from us; people who speak a different language, people with whom we may disagree on everything that is important to us in normal times.

Here I take a planned tangent to say that accepting that we need strangers to survive is to reject racism. If we see every other person as someone with the potential to help or someone who may need our help -- then difference doesn't matter. Yes, I know we all have prejudices, deeply and often unconsciously held. But if we start from where we are today, then human need for survival seems to me to be a pretty good argument against rejecting someone because of their race.

But human needs, our own needs, can be fickle and don't provide us with a firm enough foundation.

So, dare I say it, we need God.

The Shifting Sands of the Tower of Pisa

Have you been to the tower of Pisa?

For several years the "Leaning Tower of Pisa" was closed as engineers completed a 25 million dollar renovation project designed to stabilize the tower. They removed 110 tons of dirt, and reduced its famous lean by about sixteen inches. Why was this necessary? Because the tower has

been tilting further and further away from vertical for hundreds of years, to the point that the top of the 185-foot tower was seventeen feet further south than the bottom, and Italian authorities were concerned that if nothing was done, it would soon collapse. What was the problem? Bad design? Poor workmanship? An inferior grade of marble? No. The problem was what was underneath. The tower was built on the shifting sands of a former estuary. The soil was not stable enough to support a monument of this size. The bell tower had no firm foundation.

A fitting reminder that building on sand will incur great cost. Basing our world perspective on our own needs is too precarious, open to influence, bad judgment, self interest. Costly in all sorts of ways.

Building According To Code

Now is a kairos moment -- a time of great significance. Now is the time to build our lives according to a code.

We have a lot of stonework in our back yard. It's been there a long time. Where the path meets the driveway is off by about four inches -- not because the stonework has shifted, but because the driveway has. Last week, my son in law tried to cut through a path to install an upgraded hydro wire and change the level of the stone work. He had a heck of a time with saw and jackhammer trying to cut through this deep cement foundation. He thought it would be like the more recent stonework in our front yard which would have popped out with a hand chisel and a couple of taps of a hammer. Days later ...

Jesus talked about the importance of building our lives on a solid foundation. He said that the person who obeys His Word is like "a wise person who built a house on the rock"

The people there, listening to Jesus' teaching, understood well the significance of building upon rock rather than sand.

The scriptures taught us to see others, not just as a source of help or in need of help, but as images of God. From the very creation of the first humans, God was in them. Jesus pushed our boundaries from our need to their need with

- stories like the Good Samaritan. But even farther he pushed them when he identified the Samaritan, an enemy for whom his hearers would have held great prejudice, as the one to emulate.
- Experiences like his encounter with the woman of Samaria, an enemy and a woman, who would have been an outcast to his followers, except Jesus sees her as his intellectual peer, engaging her in one of the most intellectually challenging conversations of his ministry.

Jesus taught us to build on rock, hard though it is.

Building on rock meant grading the side of a slope and hauling up materials. Living in the hills made for more difficult travel. Water had to be toted and winter winds were cold. Most people followed the path of least resistance and built along the riverbeds. The scenery more pleasant, the water more conveniently located, and the house was sheltered from the cold winds of winter. And though flooding was a danger, most of the year the streams trickled pleasantly down the hillsides into the river nearby.

But on rare occasions, a torrential downpour caused a vicious flash flood which swept away everything in its path. Entire hamlets washed away. House after house gone (Matt. 7:24).

If we build according to Jesus' code, we will not be swept away when crises hit with hurricane-like force. The tempests of temptation and the storms of suffering will not be able to sweep us off a solid foundation of faith in a God who creates community for humans to thrive.

Adversity may come, yet because we have built according to the code of the unshakable Rock, Jesus Christ, we can emerge with our character strengthened.

Are we building our lives according to Jesus' code? Are we building our church on Jesus' code?

People from our past, people like Murray Young, Donna Grice, and others we have laid to rest have listened to Christ's leading. That has made this church strong in the past. We honour those who built this community according to Jesus' code.

Those who have gone before have left their marks. May we build our lives and our church according to Jesus' code and may our faith and the faith of this church be strong enough to weather terrible events and to find ways to transform them to reflect God's realm.