

Reading and homily for First Sunday after Trinity 2020



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Reading:

Matthew 7:21-29

Click on the following link for the reading:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+7%3A21-29&version=NRSVA>

Homily

Today is the first Sunday after Trinity, first of Ordinary Time, or Proper 4! Ordinary Time lasts now until Advent (late November), but as Revd Karen Nelson said in her most recent online sermon 'it's no time to be ordinary!'

And this is no ordinary Reading.

But a bit about the illustration first. It's probable that both houses were built using similar materials for walls, doors, windows, and the roof. It's possible that both houses were similar in appearance and size once completed. It's also possible that both houses had a similar number of people in them – at least one in each per the illustration – and were used for similar purposes. Indeed, unless you knew otherwise, you'd reasonably assume that they were similar in every way.

But from the reading, we know that they aren't. One house has a sure and certain foundation on rock, the other has a foundation on sand, which although plentiful, is neither sure nor certain. One house can handle the storms (though it may still suffer damage), one house cannot and collapses.

Which house would you want to live in..?

As an aside, I do hope the neighbour in the 'on the rock' house went to help (as far as they were able) their neighbour whose sandy home was gone... I'm going to assume they did.

Although outwardly they appear similar, the reality is that they are not at all similar and that is, in part, what this passage is about, and what Jesus is trying to explain to His disciples then and today.

These are challenging words from Jesus. He imagines a group of people who genuinely believe they are his followers and yet they are mistaken... They perform acts in his name, but Jesus says he never knew them. The people Jesus is rejecting are only interested in 'religious' activity, who sound religious, but have no personal, loving, obedient relationship with Him. They even prophesy and cast out demons... As the Apostle Paul put it:

'If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing...' (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Jesus is much more concerned about our walk rather than our talk. He wants us to do the right thing, not just say the right words. As James, Jesus' brother, put it:

'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.' (1:22)

And what does the word say? Essentially just these three things:

- (1) 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
- (2) 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
- (3) 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.'

Your 'house' (which represents your life) will withstand the storms of life (*'He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous'*. (Matthew 5:45)) only if you do what is right instead of just talking about doing right (though that's a good place to start!). What you do cannot be separated from what you believe; borrowing from Shakespeare: *'This above all to thine own self be true'* (Hamlet I:iii). To build "on the rock" means to be a hearing, loving, obedient believer in Jesus.

Jesus is obedient as none of us can be. He uses it to free us from attempting to be so in our own strength – suspect I'm not alone in needing to be reminded of that! He shows us the nature of God and draws around Him a community of those committed to follow where He leads them in love and obedience, enabled by the Holy Spirit. A theologian commenting on this passage wrote:

'So Jesus confronts us with himself, sets before us the radical choice between obedience and disobedience, and calls us to an unconditional commitment of mind, will and life to his teaching. The way he does it is to warn us of two unacceptable alternatives, first a merely verbal profession (v.21-23), second a merely intellectual knowledge (v.24-27). Neither can be a substitute for obedience; indeed each may be a camouflage for

disobedience. Jesus emphasises with great solemnity that on an active, practical obedience our eternal destiny depends...'

The vast majority do not, of course, deliberately build on 'on the sand'. They will use 'similar materials' such as education, employment, family, and friendship; they will eat drink and be merry to build their 'house' which represents their life. They will do good things and bad, be for richer and for poorer, and in sickness and in health.., so far so similar with which all of us can relate; but that 'on the rock' foundation will not be there...

The pandemic could be called a storm of life, one that has impacted everywhere and everyone. It has brought out both the best and the worst in people around the world, perhaps particularly in those who lead and govern, and for whom we should be praying. It has shown what is really important and what is not really...

How are your 'houses' doing in it?

Are they holding together, even if this storm of life is (apparently) beginning to pass?

The rock is available 24/7/365 (or 366 as 2020 is a Leap Year) and available to all who ask.

Which house do you want to live in..?

Until we meet again, keep safe, keep well.

AMEN