

Pastor's Message – 10/15/23
Wesley Center 50th Anniversary
Proverbs 3:13-18
Matthew 7:24-27
Psalm 127.1

I read a story recently about a Sunday school class which was drawing pictures of Jesus. One of the little girls drew a picture of Jesus on a horse and the teacher asked her why she had drawn Jesus on a horse and not on a donkey like on Palm Sunday. The girl explained that her picture showed Jesus on a mount.

I think she might be on to something. Our Bible reading from Matthew today is toward the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus lays out the ways that believers live out their lives as hearers of his teaching. This must be an important passage because Luke also includes Jesus' story about the house built on rock and another built on sand in his gospel in 6:47-49.

Probably the ultimate image of a house built on sand is actual sandcastles. When children are building a sandcastle, nothing in the world seems more important at that very moment than shaping it, making it look pretty, well balanced, and trying to protect it from the incoming sea waves or even protecting it from other children. Even the child senses that what he is building is impermanent. So, each of knows deep down that so much of what we are building in this world is impermanent.

A very striking example that I remember and that came very close to home happened during the Wisconsin Annual Conference in 2008. I was living in Reedsburg, and it was a very rainy period. There was major flooding from the Baraboo River at that time and I actually had flooding in my house from the nearby creek. But what you might remember was the breach of the bank of Lake Delton and the ensuing collapse of the houses along the Lake. I still remember pictures of houses floating down the new river after the bank collapsed.

I don't know if those houses were built on sand, but I do know that it is prudent for architectural structures to be *built on* foundations of solid *rock*. Solid rock is not easily moved. It provides stability for the walls and roof of the building. Without a rocky foundation, over time the ground will shift, and the *house* built on it will crack, break apart, and *fall*. To avoid calamity, a *wise person* builds their *house on* a foundation of *rock*. As foundations of rock are to houses, so are the *words and teachings of Jesus* to *everyone's* lives. If

the *house* of our lives is *built on the* foundation of Jesus, the storms and trials we face will not destroy *it* or cause *it* to fall (2 Corinthians 4:7-12).

Our Bible reading from Matthew today is a powerful passage that gets at the heart of Jesus' message. To be a follower of Jesus means that behaviors and actions—the way we live out our daily lives—are the artifacts of the inner life of faith. More to the point, mere words, performance of deeds, even miraculous ones done in the name of Jesus, or random deeds of mercy will not affect one's eternal destiny. Religiosity will not help either. This may come as a surprise for some. And it raises the question, if these charismatic elements that seem to indicate an alignment with Jesus and his teachings do not demonstrate that a person is saved, then what does?

Notice that nearly every aspect of the house of the *wise person* and the house of the *foolish person* is identical. Their houses are the same, the rains that fall on them are the same, the floods that rise against them are the same, the winds that blow against them are the same. There are only two differences—their foundations and their endurance.

The only thing distinguishing the *wise person* and the *foolish person* in this life is whether or not they *act on the words of Jesus*. They both heard His *words*, but only a *wise person* takes them to heart and lives them with integrity. A *foolish person* hears Jesus's words but *does not act on* them. They are like the "hearers" who James writes about, those "who delude themselves": "[H]umbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts," he writes, "for it has the power to save your souls. ²² But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like." (James 1:21-24)

This Wesley Center stands here because of, not just the faith of the builders, but the committed actions of the builders. It is still here and still serving the community, which was its original and ongoing intention, because of the faith in action of believers in the message of Jesus. It is still here because of their trust in God and because "unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." (Ps. 127.1) Proverbs tells us that those who seek out and find wisdom experience joy and gain understanding. Finding the wisdom of God and hearing and acting on the words of Jesus lead to this day: a house, the Wesley Center, built on rock, and celebration of 50 years. May it last another 50 by the faithfulness and commitment of followers of Jesus of the Waupun United Methodist Church and beyond.