



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Matt. 7: 15-29

The True Foundation!

**Through His Sermon** on the Mount, Jesus has been pointing out what it means to put His Words into practice. **On the basis** of Jesus own Words, we can say that **"the wise man who built his house on the rock is the one who is poor in spirit, who mourns, who is meek , who hungers and thirsts for righteousness."** He is the salt of the earth. He goes the extra mile. He trusts God to provide for all his needs... **all these** God-pleasing works are included when Jesus speaks of the wise man building his house on the rock. **Such a person** is prepared to endure the troubles and dangers and hardships of life. **His house is** solid and stable.

**On the other** hand... **"the foolish builder"** hears Christ's Words too... **but he** does not really put them into practice. **He may live** an outwardly decent and respectable life... **but he** does not really recognize his personal sinfulness and unworthiness and look to Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation. **Basically, he trusts** in his own words and merits. **This will lead** only to terrible disappointment, fear and doubt.

**This is a** fairly standard treatment of today's Gospel... **one that** many of you have likely heard before, in which the wise and foolish builders are compared to individual Christians. **The resulting application** of this Gospel is that you must be careful how you **"build your house,"** so to speak... **that is,** you must be careful to listen to the Words of Jesus... **take them** to heart, and put them into action in your individual lives.

**As vital and** as Scriptural as these things are... **such a** treatment of this Gospel might tempt us to overlook some of the larger aspects of our life together as the Church, **"the Body of Christ" in which each of you have a part**" (1 Corinthians 12:27). **You are to** balance individual faith with the larger, corporate realities of your life together with your fellow Christians in the Body of Christ. **If you over-emphasize** your *personal* connection with Jesus at the expense of the bigger picture...**you could** end up drawing some very dangerous... **possibly even** destructive, conclusions about yourself and about your Christian neighbor.

**For example, you** could end up being a Lutheran who has been raised in the Church and trained in the Small Catechism... **and who** claims to believe with us that in Holy Communion we receive Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins... **Yet for some** reason, this Lutheran has seen fit to begin worshipping in a different church body... **where Holy** Communion is falsely taught only to be a **"symbol of Jesus, or a representation of His Body and Blood."** **By over-emphasizing** your **personal relationship** with Jesus... **at the** expense of the **corporate realities** of that faith... **you could** end up drawing the bizarre conclusion, **"I know that this particular church believes wrongly concerning Holy Communion...but I still believe in it the right way, so everything is fine with my worshiping there."** The question then becomes **"What then, dear friend... of Jesus' Words** in this very Gospel, which warn you to **"Watch out for false prophets.**

**They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves"?** (Matthew 7:15)

**If the most important thing to you is your personal relationship with Jesus... and not your part in the larger body of Christ (this being the Church at large) for which God has created you... and in which He has placed you... it would be very easy for you to become quite tolerant of false teaching and even crass blasphemy. "I really don't know much about what my church believes or teaches. I just go there on a Sunday morning because it is convenient and I like the other activities they have!" With this sort of thinking... it will not be long before the Church ends up living among thornbushes and thistles, rather than the good vineyard of the pure Word of God... which produces the fruit of good works and love for neighbor.**

**The point is this... we must be very careful never to insulate or isolate our faith and our lives from those others to whom God has given the gift of faith and life. There is much more to being Christian than just me and Jesus! The faith and life together in the Church is much, much more than just our personal relationship with our Lord! Today's Gospel speaks about building the house upon rock ...,or upon sand...but I would strongly suggest this...perhaps the building is not entirely up to you. Perhaps...just perhaps you are the house which gets built by another.**

**St. Peter is one of the original hearers of the Sermon on the Mount and he gives us a clue about hearing this Gospel when he writes to you the Church in his first letter, "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). St. Paul furthers this same image in his letter to the Ephesians, in which he speaks about you... the Church... being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).**

**Elsewhere, St. Paul also describes the on-going work of the pastoral office...this is to say Christ's Office...a work for and among the whole people of God...with these words: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light" (1 Corinthians 3:10-13).**

**The message of the Scriptures is that we are given to "encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Dear friends, you do not need to find for yourself the assurance of your forgiveness and life... because it is proclaimed to you from an outside source...it comes from above. It comes from God alone! All of your sins are forgiven ...eternal life is right now yours...not because "you" have managed to build your house on the rock... but because you have been "built [together] into a spiritual house" (1Peter 2:5), incorporated into "the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Please notice who is in the verbs here! Our faith...our life together as the Church of Christ is all God's work!**

**In this Gospel lesson it is far better that we see the house-building in this Gospel to refer to our corporate life together in Christ... as we gather here around the Word of Christ's forgiveness and**

His gifts of consolation and peace. **Far better that** we not over-emphasize our individuality... **but that** we steadfastly "**encourage one another and build each other up**" (1 Thessalonians 5:11), as St. Paul calls upon us to do. **Far better that** we realize... **by God's Grace... that none** of us must stand alone whenever the storms blow and the flood waters rise. **We have been** incorporated... **we have been built into... something much** stronger... **much more** solid and more firmly founded than ourselves. **That is to say**, we are "**like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house**" (1 Peter 2:5) which is the Church that is "**built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone**" (Ephesians 2:20).

**"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock."**

**Today's Gospel speaks** very well to our corporate life together in this "**spiritual house**" (1 Peter 2:5) **the House that God has created for us** by His Word and His gifts... **and by** which God continues to build through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. **This Gospel already** has spoken about the whole Church's responsibility of watching out for false prophets who come among you as wolves in sheep's clothing... **and about** the whole Church's responsibility of measuring the words and deeds of those who are sent to you... **so that** you may know them by their fruits. **Here in the** parable of the two houses, the focus **is on communities** that share the fate of their preachers. **Teachers who remain** faithful to Jesus' Words are called '**wise**' because they provide a foundation for their churches that will last forever (David Scaer, Discourses in Matthew, 242).

**Your burden in** this Gospel is that you see to it... **and insist... that your pastor build only on the solid Rock** which is Christ. **I have told you all many times...test what I preach...test what any pastor preaches. Hold your pastor to the Word of God! In this way... you build** along with him upon "**the Foundation of Rock...who is Christ!! The work of** every teacher in the Church must always be tested by the Words of Jesus... **in order** that it may be shown that there is no sand allowed into the mix.

**"False teachers lead their followers into the same destruction that God has planned for them."** **So all Christians** are warned that they will share the fate of their teachers, which means it does matter to which church one belongs (Scaer, 242-243).

**Yet in that place** where Jesus' Words remain... **there is** great security and peace. **In that place** where the builder uses only the best materials to build upon the **solid Rock Foundation of Christ... there shall** be found a sure hiding place against the storm. **In that place** where the whole house of God...**the "spiritual house"** (1 Peter 2:5)... **where such** remains intent on Christ's proclamation of forgiveness... **life and** salvation for the sake of **His death and resurrection... there you** shall find true sanctuary and respite from every assault. **Where you are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone"** (Ephesians 2:20)... **the rains** may indeed fall and the streams may rise, and the wind may blow and beat against the house.... **Yet it shall not fall, "because it [has] its foundation on the rock."** **Other, lesser houses** may fall... **but you...the collective you...all of you together...are "are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit"** (Ephesians 2:22). **Nothing can destroy that house. This my friends is all Christ Work...and as such...our great**

**Blessing....our sins are forgiven and our eternal future is absolutely secure. In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen**

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Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Libby, Montana