



April 28, 2019

God Gives Us Something Solid to Build On  
Pastor Shelley Cunningham

**Matthew 7:21-29 NLT**

<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup>On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ <sup>23</sup>But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

<sup>24</sup>“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. <sup>25</sup>Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. <sup>26</sup>But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. <sup>27</sup>When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

<sup>28</sup>When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup>for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs. Naturally, they needed a place to stay. But they couldn’t agree on what kind of house would do. So they each built their own - this one used [straw], this one liked [sticks], and the third went for [brick]. They built and built, and when they were done, it was very good. But one day, along came a big, hungry wolf. He politely asked each pig for something to eat. “Little pig, little pig, please let me come in.” But these pigs were not very hospitable: “Not by the hair of my [chiny chin chin]!” So the wolf, who was so very hungry, had no choice but

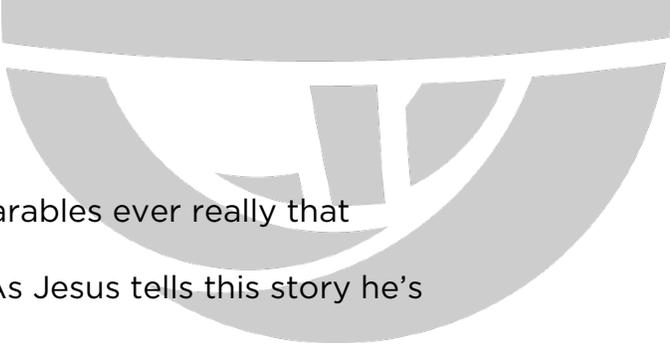


to huff and puff and blow the house in – which worked pretty well for the straw house, and the stick house. But the third pig had more than bacon for brains. His nice, strong brick house stood just fine as the wolf blew. This time, the wolf huffed and puffed and huffed and puffed until he was completely out of breath, and just went back home. Or something like that.

I think we can all agree on which little pig made the best choice of building materials: the brick pig, of course. We like that pig. Sure, he had to work a little harder; yes, his house cost a bit more than the others, but it had excellent resale value. It was strong enough to withstand the toughest test. That pig who build his house out of brick was one smart hog.

So how many of you would say you're brick-house kind of people? [raise your hands] Brick-house people are solid and sensible. They make good choices, work hard, invest well. They eat plenty of fruits and fiber and don't skip days at the gym. Brick-house people do everything they can to build a strong foundation for their lives. Because although you can't always anticipate the wolves of this world, you can take care of yourself so you're ready when they arrive. That's why a parable like the one from today's gospel makes you feel pretty good, because you actually get what Jesus is trying to say. Go ahead, brick-house people: give yourselves a pat on the back. Because clearly you are practicing what Jesus preaches in today's gospel. Right?

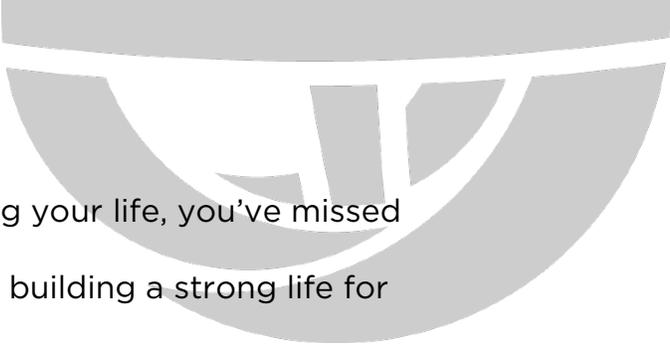




Or are you? Think a minute ... are Jesus' parables ever really that easy? No, they are not. There's always a catch. As Jesus tells this story he's surrounded by hundreds of people, probably looking out over the dusty hills. You can almost see him pointing as he speaks. See that green valley down there? The one with the shady trees, the one dotted with rooftops? That's the wadi, and it's prime real estate. A wadi is a dried-up river basin. It's pretty and sheltered from the wind. Water is easy to find. Sure, there's always a chance that if the spring rains are unusually heavy, there might be a flood, but plenty of people in Jesus' day were more than willing to take that chance. That's because very few people in Palestine wanted to live in the rocks. To build on rock meant a lot of hard work. You had to grade the slope, and haul up materials. It was difficult to get there - which meant few visitors, and traveling to the market was a challenge. Water had to be toted up. There was no place to keep livestock. Winter winds were colder. Building on rock meant sacrifice, struggle, isolation, and hardship - not the security, comfort, and sign of wise living that we think of. When Jesus told they people they should build on a rock, they must have thought he was crazy.

Of course, Jesus isn't talking about building a house. He's talking about building a life. But in the eyes of the world, his idea of a strong foundation is kind of crazy. Oh, I don't think Jesus would argue with a well-thought-out retirement plan and a little more attention paid to diet and





exercise. But if that's as far as you get in planning your life, you've missed the point. It's not about taking care of yourself - building a strong life for yourself. It's about what you can do to make others strong. That's how you'll really come to know God and the kind of security only God can provide.

Remember where this passage comes from? Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It's one of the Bible's most beloved texts ... but if you really read it through, it will probably make you a little uncomfortable. Jesus calls for radical hospitality. He pushes toward extravagant generosity. He turns our neat and tidy expectations of God upside down. And he calls out people whose words and their deeds don't match.

I don't know about you, but this makes me squirm a bit. Because sometimes I have to work exceedingly hard to be patient and kind. I don't always radiate grace and mercy. I may hear Jesus' words and nod politely, but putting them into practice takes work. A lot of work. And sometimes I'm too tired or too stressed or too self-absorbed. And the foundation under my house shifts a little bit.

The good news is, Jesus is pretty clear what he wants of us. Want to be strong? Try being a servant. Want to find peace? Let go of your anger. Want to experience God's love? Seek out someone lonely, or sick, or grieving - and just be with them. Want to practice mercy? Give someone the benefit of the doubt instead of assuming they're in the wrong. Want to



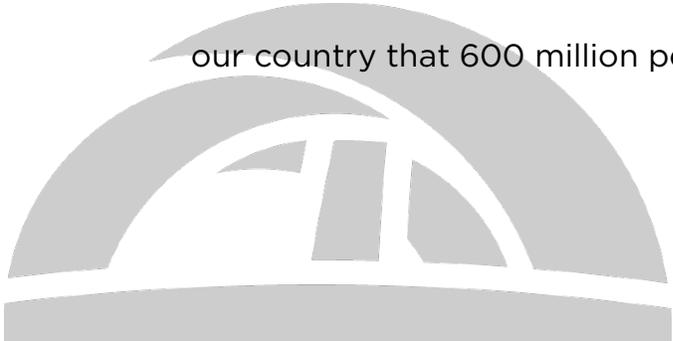


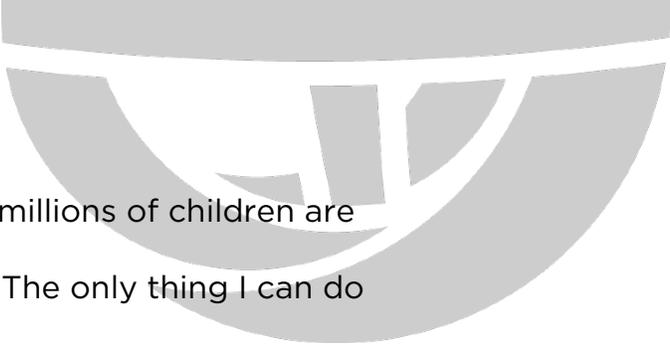
find truth and meaning? Turn to the Bible instead of to Twitter. That's how we build a firm foundation.

Last weekend our 9<sup>th</sup> graders gathered as a class one last time. We started with an art project. That's what happens when one of your mentors is our VBS craft expert. It was messy and random and surprisingly engaging. When the students were finished modge-podging their finished products weren't much to look at. But together, their work came together to create something beautiful. The cross is the foundation we have to work with ... but what a place to start.

Friends, the work of being God's people is messy and random and surprisingly engaging. It's not always glamorous or sensible. But it is deeply meaningful.

At one time, Cardinal Paul-Emil Leger was one of the most powerful men in Canada. He was the head of the Roman Catholic church, well-respected, fair, and humble. But he was also frustrated by the growing gap between rich and poor. So one day he laid aside his red vestments and stately hat, resigned his office in Quebec City, and disappeared. He left no forwarding address. Years later a Canadian journalist found him living among the outcasts of a small village in Africa. He asked the cardinal why he had given up his position of power and left the comfortable life he had known. Cardinal Leger replied, "It will be the great scandal of the history of our country that 600 million people are eating well and living luxuriously





while three billion people starve and every year millions of children are dying of hunger. I am too old to change all that. The only thing I can do which makes sense is to be present.”

Being present with people who are in need and caring for them deeply ... that’s building a house on rock. Giving your time and money away for the sake of others ... that’s building a house on rock. Putting your trust not in things but in Christ ... that’s building a house on rock. And it’s the only way to truly live. Amen.

