

A FOUNDATION BUILT ON THE ROCK!

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

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1 Corinthians 3:10–23

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

I imagine that everyone here remembers the story of the Big Bad Wolf. In that child's story the three little pigs decided to build homes to keep the Big Bad Wolf out.

Once upon a time there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes. Before they left, their mother told them, "Whatever you do, do your best, give it your all, because that's the way to get along in the world". The first little pig built his house out of straw because it was the easiest thing to do. The second little pig built his house out of sticks. This was a little bit stronger than a straw house. The third little pig built his house out of stones or bricks.

One night the big bad wolf, who dearly loved to eat little pigs, came along and saw the first little pig in his house of straw. He said "Let me in, Let me in, little pig or I'll huff and puff and blow your house in!" But the little pig responded "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin." And of course the wolf did blow down the house in and ate the first pig. The wolf then came to the house of sticks. "Let me in ,Let me in little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in" And of course the little pig said "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin." But the wolf blew that house in also, and ate the second little pig. The wolf then came to the house of stones or bricks. "Let me in, let me in, I'll blow your house in" The third pig of course responded "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

Well, the wolf huffed and puffed and he huffed and he puffed and huffed and he puffed but he could not blow that stone or that brick house in. But the wolf was a sly old wolf and he climbed up on the roof to look for a way into the brick house. The little pig saw the wolf climb up on the roof and lit a roaring fire in the fireplace and placed on it a large kettle of water on the fire. When the wolf finally found the hole in the chimney he crawled down and KERSPLASH right into that kettle of boiling water and that was the end of his troubles with the big bad wolf. The next day the little pig invited his mother over. She said "You see it is just as I told you. The way to get along in the world is to do things as well as you can, some elbow grease and hard work." Fortunately for that little pig, he learned that lesson. And he just lived happily ever after!

Well that's the way we like to think of life. We compare it to a bunch of moral stories with happily ever after endings. And if you look the story of The Three Pigs which by the way was written by James Orchard Halliwell in 1849, you might falsely think, all you need in life to succeed is hard work and applied effort and then everything will be alright. At least this is what we have been teaching our kids. The rendition of the story I shared was from an audio tape that was distributed by Burger King in the kid's meal in 1988.

The moral is, "if you build your house out of stone or brick then you are set", right! Not necessarily. A few years ago Denise and I went to Florida to help our son and his wife move back to the Midwest. The houses in the area where our son and his wife lived were built out of sinter block or some type of concrete. These houses were designed to withstand hurricane wind force. Small houses, big houses, mansions all of them made the same way. If you look deep through the stucco exterior of a mansion you can catch glimpses of the lines of the blocks used to form those walls.

As you might know, Florida is a vast marshland. The soil is either sandy or peaty. As you drive down the back roads you'll see little red flags sticking up out of the asphalt or sometimes cones or even collapsible signs on the asphalt. They warn of sink holes which can show up overnight. You don't want to drive into a sink hole it can ruin your day.

Every once in a while you're driving along you might catch a glimpse of a beautiful custom built house, made of concrete bricks, a stone house, regardless of well built it is, this big beautiful house ends up sinking into the bog below. Everything seemed to be done right, but eventually the house will fall apart if the foundation gives way.

And that brings us to our text today. St. Paul is dealing with a group of people, the Corinthians, who have the moralistic mentality mixed with some prosperity theology that says: "If I do this I expect God to do that". In other words it's like saying; "I am earning God's favor, my grace with God by what I do". And that's like building a stone house in a marsh. But in the end the foundation is self and the end result is failure. It's hard work to lift and lay stones; it's agonizing and strenuous work but without the right foundation the building topples and falls apart.

St. Paul says: ***"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"***. Paul is a worker according to the grace given. The Greek word for grace is (ca,rij) charis which literally means a gift. St. Paul is saying according to the Gift God has given me. Even the word according (kata) means to reach down. God reached down out of heaven and gave St. Paul the gift of being like a master builder which was given through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In and of himself St. Paul was nothing. Only through the gift given by God from above, that knowledge of Jesus Christ, was St. Paul able to be anything. Quite the opposite of that moral little story of the Three Pigs isn't it?

The world says, "If it's meant to be, it's up to me!" Betty Davis claimed this as her favorite Bible verse; Jack Lalanne among countless others of the world love quoting it like a Bible verse, "God helps those, who help themselves!" It is neither a Bible verse nor a Biblical doctrine; but a doctrine of man of law and of self. These are moralisms that lead to despair and failure for their foundation is on self. For there is none who do good, none who are righteous, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Ps 14, 53, Rom 3:23)

Verse 11: **“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”**. Verse 11 is speaking about the person, word, and work of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation. It is already "laid." It cannot be augmented, supplanted, or replaced. Our foundation, our hope, our joy is in Jesus Christ, period! This is such a mammoth truth that St. Paul makes sure we get it. So he clarifies it with verses 12-15. Listen carefully. **Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.** Gold and silver and precious stones don't perish in fire. They are tested and made pure and sure. They represent the pure doctrine of the church. It is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ it is trust worthy and salvific in nature. It points to the cross (†) and says, He has done it all and He has done it for you.

Others *build wood, hay, and straw*, on this foundation. That is, they start with the foundation, but they depart from the mind of Christ in many matters, substitute their own fancies and inventions in the place of His doctrines and His institutions, and build upon the good foundation that which will not survive the test when the day of trial comes. The fire will make it manifest, as wood, hay, and straw, will perish by the fire. There is a time coming when a disclosure will be made of what men have built on this foundation: **Every man's work shall be made manifest**, it shall be laid open to view, to self and to others. Some may, in the simplicity of their hearts, build with wood and straw on the good foundation, and not even know it. But the day will come when the Lord will show their error to them in its proper light. Every man's work shall be made manifest to himself, and made manifest to others, both those that have been misled by him and those that have escaped his errors. For in that day, **“Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done”**. When you hear those words I hope it strikes a little fear in you. Every work you have done will become manifest! That word manifest if you haven't figured it out yet means, made clear, become obvious made noticeable. Now let me read the last verse from our Gospel lesson for today Matthew 5:48, **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”**. What are we to do? How can we be perfect?

Dealing with sin and this idea of perfection and what Christ has done as our foundation is enormous in the Lutheran Church. Have you ever noticed how many hymns are devoted to it? “The Churches One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord. She is His new creation by water and the Word.” Or what about, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness, no merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus name, On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.” Here's another, you just sang it: Christ is our cornerstone, On him alone we build; With his true saints alone The courts of heaven are filled. On his great love Our hopes we place Of present grace And joys above. And one more: Not the labors of my hands, Can fulfil Thy Law's demands; Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone. Of course that last one is Rock of Ages.

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”. Your salvation, your forgiveness, lies not in what you do, or what you can do, or what you have done, but in Christ alone. Verse 16 says: **“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”** When did you become a temple of the Spirit of God? John the Baptizer said of Jesus, **“He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”** (Matthew 3:11). In your baptism God took up residency in you.

You belong to Christ, yoked to Him in your baptism, made into a temple of the Holy Spirit. Those things of gold and silver and fine stones are the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit through you. For you are a member of God's Holy Family adopted as children through the water and word. You are God's child not by what you have done but by what Jesus did for you. By His holy incarnation; His holy nativity; His baptism, fasting, and temptation; by His agony and bloody sweat; by His cross and His passion; by His precious death and burial; and By His glorious resurrection and ascension, Jesus paid the price for you. Jesus perfection is credited to you.

You are God's child, built on the foundation built on the rock who is Jesus Christ. For all your sins have been forgiven, price paid in full by the blood of Jesus, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in Jesus name, amen and amen.

*The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN!*