

Pentecost Season A (080601)
Galilee Church, Virginia Beach, VA
A sermon by the Rev. Dr. James B. Magness

Genesis 6.9-22; 7.24; 8.14-19
Psalm 46
Romans 1.16-17; 3.22b-28, (29-31)
Matthew 7.21-29

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God."¹

As the scripture tells the reader, Noah was a virtuous, upright and blameless man. Noah was a remarkable person, if for no other reason than for the absence of his sinfulness. Obviously in this story, intense with symbolism, the people of the world in which Noah lived were not exhibiting the same type of holy behavior. As a matter of record, the scripture goes on to say that: "...the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon earth."²

Noah, also known by the church as the second Adam who gives the world and all of God's creation a second chance, was the builder of the new beginning for mankind.

In the fourth century after Christ Bishop John Chrysostom, a man well known the father of orthodoxy, wrote that Noah was the only man alive at that time who could find favor with God. This was Noah who "...had no care for human glory or scorn or irreverence."³ Noah's only concern was to be found worthy in the sight of God who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Isn't it somewhat incredible to you that a mere six chapters after we have the story of the creation of the world and the placement of its foundations, that these foundations are washed away by a flood for a start-over, a new beginning with a new foundation!

What could have possibly have gone wrong in a short few hundred years? How could have the world have become so corrupt?

Sometimes when I read or hear this Genesis story I really want to get down to the bottom of things so that I can know just what the sin was that led to the destruction of the world by the flood. I don't want to be in a situation such that every time I hear thunder that I think, "Oh, oh, here we go again!"

Well, what did the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve do wrong? What do you think?
*Did they develop an unorthodox set of values and go against the accepted code of thought and belief in God?

¹ Genesis 6.10, *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version.*

² Genesis 6.12, *Ibid.*

³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 23.4*

*Could it have been that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve broke some rule about, well I must say it, sex?

*Do you think that possibly they began to move into the wrong neighborhoods and thus struck up friendships with, shall we say unsavory people of questionable ancestry?

A compelling response to this question is taken up again by Jesus in the reading from the gospel according to Matthew. Jesus' concern is about, once again, how we create a life built upon a solid foundation. To put a finer point upon Jesus' teaching, the concern is to have a foundation for life that is so solid, so unshakable, so unmovable that when the worst storm clouds bring in the seemingly unbearable storms of life, the followers of Jesus will survive.

Many of you know about those storms of life. * When your spouse or child died you experienced a severe life storm.

*When your business failed or you lost your job, and your income evaporated you experienced a severe life storm.

*When you felt that you were no longer appreciated by the persons who matter most you experienced a severe life storm.

*When your marriage failed you experienced a severe life storm.

*When your life was threatened by a severe and unalterable illness you experienced a severe life storm.

*When your family home was been ravaged or destroyed by the acts of nature you experienced a severe life storm.

And I could go on, and on, and on. Sooner or later, for all of us, the storm will rush in and the thunder clouds will sound the alarm. Is my life built upon a sufficiently solid foundation to enable me to survive and live through the storm? Or will I be destroyed?

It is the understatement of the day to say that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve did not have a solid enough life foundation to withstand the storm. The windows of heaven opened up, and the water came down to wash them away.

But Jesus, what will you tell us about what the proper foundation is, for still we don't know? What is the solid rock upon which to build a life?

First Jesus tells what will not pass for the solid foundation.

We can do worship very, very well, and we can say "Lord, Lord" all we want, and it will never be enough. We can't slide into heaven by name dropping. And by the way, we are no more made a Christian by attending church, than we are made an automobile by entering a garage. We can say our Kyries, our creeds and the Lord's Prayer, all with absolute clarity and perfect diction, and still never build a proper foundation for life.

We can go out and do good works of healing and miracles, and it will never be enough. We can spin off the most dynamic programs anyone has ever seen or heard of – and fill every seat in the building – and it will never be enough.

We can put preachers in the pulpit who will leave us spellbound from the moment words proceed from their lips, but it will never be enough to build the solid foundation for life.

When the storms of life come, we will be washed away. It-has-happened-before,-and-it-can-happen-again.

So, are we consigned to reliving what already has been the history of this and so many other churches? Do we have a chance?

The scripture for today's gospel lesson about the foundations for life began when Jesus had gone up a mountain and began to teach his disciples. According to the gospel record this passage that ended up with words about the foundations for life and faith began like this: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.⁴

Preceding Jesus' statements about building a solid foundation, his teaching is about what it takes to be a community of belief, about how we ought to live together within the body of Christ, about what it takes to build that community of belief as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus' preaching and teaching in this lesson is directed to persons inside the community of faith, to include the doctrinally correct Pharisees and Sadducees, and to his unconventional followers who were from outside of the synagogue of his day. I believe that Jesus was well aware that destructive behavior within the community of the faithful had to be eradicated. Otherwise, though his followers might speak the right message, their inconsistent lives would betray their spoken words. Thus Jesus taught people how they were called to treat one another in the earthly version of the Kingdom of God. I see that there were at least two behaviors that were so destructive to the early Christian community that they had to be entirely eliminated.

The first was a complaining attitude. Jesus knew full well that people were investing a great deal of energy complaining about him to the leaders of the synagogue. In turn the leaders of the synagogue were doing their best to work up public opinion against Jesus. Jesus' message to his followers was as plain as it was clear: such behavior is not and will not be fruitful in the kingdom of God.

⁴ Matthew 5.3-11, *Ibid.*

Have you ever noticed how constant complainers work their agenda? There is always someone who does not do "it" right, whatever "it" happens to be. The others always get "it" wrong, and by the way the complainer can always get "it" right. People whose lives are built upon this foundation are in bondage to their negativism spreading dissatisfaction and disunity.

The second destructive behavior is the refusal to forgive. In the gospel of Mark Jesus addressed this while teaching in the temple when he said: whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive your trespasses.⁵

As another priest of this church has said, there is not a single behavior that will quench and grieve the Holy Spirit of God more so than unforgiveness.⁶ The refusal to forgive is excess baggage that brothers and sisters in Christ cannot afford to have in their midst.

Jesus impressed a lot of folk in his day. He impressed them through his use of language and through being familiar with proverbs and parables that would relate to the people who heard to him. However, what absolutely astonished people about Jesus, and ultimately was a root cause for which he went to the cross, was the authority with which he spoke. As the Son of God we would expect Jesus to be a person of authority. However, there was more, much more about Jesus than only his divinity. In his humanity he had an incredible and humble way with which he could connect with the humanity of his hearers and followers.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I know how much you yearn for the foundation of solid rock community. I want you to know that there is good news for us. I truly believe that today we have gathered as God's people, inspired by the Spirit ...

To witness more effectively,

To listen more deeply,

To speak more truthfully,

To live more peacefully,

To love more energetically,

To teach more eloquently,

To pray more seriously,

To worship more enthusiastically,

To celebrate more joyfully,

To sing more faithfully,

To give more generously, and

To serve more compassionately.⁷

My prayer is that God will bless what we offer and make us into what God desires.

AMEN.

⁵ Mark 11:25, *Ibid*.

⁶ Jim Glennon, "Power Over Sinful Habits," *The Anglican Digest*, (Pentecost, 2008) p. 11.

⁷ Homiletics Online,

http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040384, accessed May 31, 2008.