

Sermon 3 March 2019

Luke 6:39-49

The crux of this passage lies in the story of the wise man who builds his house on rock. This analogy can apply to countless situations in life, but this morning I would like to apply it to our church. So what about the first two illustrations in this passage? Where do they fit in with the story of the man building his house on rock?

The first illustration is about worrying about a speck in our friends' eye when we need to check out the plank in our own eye (*verses 39-40*). Essentially this is about not judging others, because, after all, we all have our faults. However, if we apply it to our church, I think it is about worrying over small details and in the process overlooking the bigger picture. Two weeks ago I did offer the thought that perhaps down through the ages the church has become a little too preoccupied with detail of ritual etc to the detriment of the bigger picture, which is just about the spreading of love to God and people. I am not too sure how true it is, but it is claimed that in 1917 the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were having such an intense debate over vestments that they sort of lost focus on the fact that the Bolsheviks were in the process of launching their revolution. Whether true or not, we do need to be careful where our priorities lie.

Our priorities must be with people, not rules and procedures. There is a story about Queen Victoria who was hosting a diplomatic reception in London. The guest of honour was an African chieftain. All went well during the meal until, at the end, finger bowls were served. The guest of honour had never seen a British finger bowl, and no one had thought to brief him beforehand about its purpose. So he took the finger bowl in his two hands, lifted it to his mouth and drank, right down to the last drop.

For an instant, there was breathless silence among the British upper crust, and they began whispering to one another. All that quickly stopped when Queen Victoria took her finger bowl in her two hands, lifted it, and drank. The next moment, 500 British ladies and gentlemen did the same!

Queen Victoria had put the interest and well-being of her guest before rules and convention. We need to be careful that we do the same.

The second illustration concerns trees and fruit (*verses 43-45*). Only good trees will produce fruit, which means that what we do and say will be determined by the sort of people we are. In the end, our church is about people, and if our church is to truly be the body of Christ, then how we treat people, whether they be in our immediate community or beyond, will determine that. Buildings are fine, in fact they are important because you must have the necessary facilities, but if the focus is on building to the detriment of people, in the same vein as ritual, then our church will be failing its duty and purpose.

So we come to the illustration of the person who builds his house on rock in contrast to the person who builds his house on sand (*verses 47-49*). So how does this relate to our church? Jesus tells us that it is like someone who listens to his teaching and obeys him. One of the meanings of *obey* is to 'behave in accordance with'. The person who builds his house on rock behaves in accordance with the teaching, the values, the life of Jesus. To do this with conviction calls for faith. Without faith, we don't have anything. The only way we can reflect something of Jesus in our lives is to believe in him, believe in everything he stands for. I cannot stress this strongly enough. The foundation of our church is people, people who have faith in Jesus, who obey Jesus. The Christian ethic is about working with and alongside people, not in isolation.

Demonstration – dropping \$5 note and have someone trying to catch it)

Communicate, encourage, affirm, respect, care – that's the Christian way of doing things; that builds relationships and that will build our church. Let's not forget that. Let me finish with this from what Paul says in Ephesians 1:22-23. '*And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ who fills everything with his presence.*'

I think that says it all.

Reverend Warner Wilder

