

**16 September 2018**

**Life-shaping Stories—Wk2: Building a NEW Life /Matthew 7:13-29**

One summer when I was in university I invited one of my friends from town to come camping in the country for a weekend. As part of the adventure I offered a relaxing canoe trip down our local river. As it turned out, just before that weekend it poured rain for two days straight. I had been concerned about too little water in the river, now it was verging on too much. The current was fast and furious. My friend was anxious to go anyway, so we set out. I soon discovered, however, that he had less paddling experience than I had realized. In navigating the canoe—I was on my own. With the strong eddies in the river and the speed of the current, it took everything I had just to keep that canoe straight and going in the right direction; one little distraction, one little moment of inattention and it was gone; suddenly we would be doing circles down the middle of this sizeable swift-flowing river—headed for dear knows where.

Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount in the peaceful waters of grace, with unqualified tenderness, embracing in his opening Beatitudes all those who feel least included. Yet now here in today's reading we find ourselves in the most challenging stretch of white-water rapids yet. Jesus concludes his core Kingdom-teaching sermon with unqualified toughness—the call to build a life on the will of God amid the swift flowing currents of everyday life. Jesus is not only a welcoming loving Saviour, he is also a deeply challenging Saviour!

We're in the midst of a worship series here at St. Andrew's called **Life-Shaping Stories**. Through this fall we are focusing on key parables of Jesus that have life-shaping implications for our lives and this community of faith. Today at the end of Jesus' most important teaching section in Matthew—the Sermon on the Mount—we hear the story of the wise and the foolish builder.

Are there any builders in our midst? You all would certainly know that before you construct anything you've got to get the foundation right. In Jesus' story, the first builder scouts out the perfect foundation location choosing solid rock on which to build. When the rain comes, the gales blow and the swirling flood waters encircle—the house that's built on the rock stands firm. Another builder, however, thought he could shortcut by picking up a building lot with a price too good to be true on sandy land. On the outside it looks perfect. But when the rain falls and the swirling floods come, the house on the sand falls flat—and great is its fall, Jesus says.

You already realize that Jesus is not just talking about the perils of shortcuts and poor house construction here—but rather the perils of taking shortcuts when building a life amid the swirling floods of a chaotic world. God has graciously given each of us a hand in the construction of our life and soul. Every experience we have—both good and bad that happens to us—becomes part of us. Brick by brick, stone by stone. The decisions we make contribute to, or detract from our becoming certain sorts of people. Our lives become a kind of sum of those various decisions.

“So pay attention,” says Jesus, “pay close attention to your living if you want to build on solid rock and enter through the narrow gate that leads to life and which few people find. Otherwise, you will end up swept away with the current through the wide and easy gate that leads to destruction, the one that most are travelling on—the way of doing ‘what pleases ME.’”

Jesus here sets his face against any idea that you can simply “go with the flow,” allowing the crowd and culture to set the pace and the direction. First, each of us has to decide if we really want to get in through the narrow gate. If you just drift, allowing the prevailing current to take you where it will, you’ll miss it. As the Message reading said: “The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.” We need to be awake and to have our eye on the ball when it comes to living the spiritual life—to give it concerted effort—if we are going to find that narrow way and solid rock foundation that Jesus tells us about. Is this what you’re longing for?

(SLIDE-Door) Here’s a picture of one narrow gate or door that you may have seen before. It’s the entrance to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem—one of the oldest churches in the world that is built on the site of what tradition tells us is the place where Jesus was born. This is the front door, “the door of humility,” where one must bow in order to enter this narrow gate. It’s quite fitting that one must bend oneself to enter the place where Jesus was born and made himself lowly. **Should we try something like this at St. Andrew’s?** Some of you will be in the habit of kneeling to pray—this is the stance of the

Christian life that reminds us that the key to building a life on a solid rock foundation is humbly bending our lives to fit the Father's will—what the Message calls “serious obedience.”

In this key passage there is a redefinition of life for us; life is now to shaped according to the pattern of Jesus' own service and teachings—not just merely what I WANT. The focus for the solid rock life is always, Jesus. True wise women and men are those who immerse themselves in this one-of-a-kind life, soaking up every single detail, letting it speak into their lives until as one colleague used to say—we begin to speak with a Galilean accent—and act as a channel of the very love of Jesus. Is it time for a re-immersion in this life—some regular daily immersion in Jesus?

Letting Jesus shape our lives is more than education and more than mere rule-keeping. Love enemies—check. Be generous—check. Pray each day—check. No, Jesus is talking about something deeper here: a transformed heart through which **the Spirit produces** a transformed life—a revolutionary change in us that is possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God is already active in life through all sorts of activities, coincidences, miracles and life events. When we open ourselves to working with God and align our lives more and more with the Spirit and God's will, small coincidences and miracles just keep happening. We pray, “Show me who I can help today.” Then an hour later someone with a need crosses our path and we have what's needed to offer assistance. Presbyterian, Frank Laubach described it this way: “I feel simply carried along each hour, doing my part in a plan which is far beyond myself. This sense of cooperation with God in little things is what so astonishes me.... I need something and turn around to

find it waiting for me. I must work, to be sure, but there is God working along with me. God takes care of all the rest. My part is to live this hour in continuous inner conversation with God in perfect responsiveness to his will to make this hour gloriously rich.”

The key is to let go of our own attachments, agendas and desires so that we can simply be open to how God leads us moment by moment in what can become a running conversation. When we work in tandem with God’s will doors have a habit of opening in the most surprising places. This is how I’ve ended up here in Calgary at St. Andrew’s. And every week I understand more about why God asked me to come here.

Each one of you is building a house – building a life, a career, a family, brick by brick, board by board. The decisions you make contribute to or detract from your becoming certain sorts of people. Everyone builds a house on some foundation. Jesus invites us to believe and **trust** that his words are the most stable foundation in the world.

It is my prayer that St. Andrew’s can be a community that understands that Jesus Voice is not merely offering some life-enrichment words to improve our better standard of living, but rather the strong core foundational words for building a life on—and for rebuilding and renewing this community of faith. That as a church we understand that faith can really come to **ask something** of us - and that we will discover together the great rewards of living for someone other than ourselves, and following in the will and love of this Great One who is truly the way, the truth and the life.

**Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald**

**Lead Minister, St. Andrew's, Calgary**