

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Build Your House on a Rock!

This week I saw a video on the news, and when I saw it, I couldn't help but think of Jesus' words in our gospel lesson for today. It was a shot of houses knocked off their foundations by that earthquake in Nepal. It was a very dramatic picture. Admittedly, it's not exactly the same image that Jesus uses today – he speaks of a storm and a flood – but I think the idea is similar. And of course, we've all seen dramatic footage of hurricanes and floods and houses washed away. Jesus was thinking of those kinds of scenes and he used them to teach us an important lesson about our lives on this earth. Today is Confirmation day here at Peace. Today, we will hear the confession of faith of three young people and we will rejoice in what God had done in their hearts and lives. To them and to all of you who have gathered in God's house today, Jesus' message is simple and clear: **build your house on a rock!**

I.

What does this mean? These three young people have answered that Lutheran question for me more times than I can count, most recently yesterday at their examination when each of them recited one of the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. Luther never intended that question to be just an empty formula. He wanted us to think about what the commandments and the articles mean for our faith and our lives. And I'm totally serious, when I ask that question in regard to Jesus' metaphor. **Build your house on a rock! What does this mean?**

What is your house? Obviously, this isn't a first century version of *This Old House*. The house Jesus is talking about is your life. Every day that you're here in this world, you add another set bricks, you put in a window, you add shingles to the roof – depending on how old you are and where you are in the process. How you live and the choices you make are the life you build. Most of us are trying to build a life that we can be happy with. We get married and have children. We go to college and find a career and try to get a job that we enjoy and that covers the bills. We make choices about how we're going to spend our free time – all these things are part of building that house. Now, when you're at the end of 8th grade, you're at a different point in the process than when you're in your fifties. But the high school you go to and what you do there – the academics, the extracurriculars, the friendships – all will be part of building your house. They'll all be part of the life you're building.

Jesus tells us that whatever you do to build that house, build it on the rock. All buildings rest on a foundation. The building of your life needs a solid foundation. What is that foundation? You know. It's Jesus. It's his love and his work for you. For the last two years in catechism class, we've been working to lay that foundation and all three of you have been exemplary students. You know the doctrine that God gave us. But laying that foundation didn't start in catechism class. All three of you have been working on it since you were in preschool here at Peace. Teacher after teacher has taught you how much your Savior loves you. All of your teachers have rejoiced to see your faith. But even Jesus Time in preschool wasn't the beginning of the effort to lay that foundation. That began when your parents brought you to be baptized, right in this sanctuary, at this baptismal font. The Holy Spirit laid the foundation of Christ and his life and death and resurrection for you when a pastor took water and poured it on your head and said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Not one of you remembers that day. But it happened. The Holy Spirit reached into your heart through the gospel in that sacrament and he made you his.

Jesus tells you to build your house on that rock. He tells what will happen if you do it wrong: the rains will come and the winds will blow and beat on the life you're building and because it has no foundation, it will collapse. That is the fate of every life built on sand. What is the sand? It's the pursuit of money and standard

of living. It's popularity. It's satisfying the desires that rule your sinful heart. What will your life be all about? How will you decide what career to pursue? What college to go to? What activities to participate in when you're in high school? How will you look for the husband or wife that you will marry? If your foundation is money or lifestyle or popularity or any other value of this world, you're building on sand and your house is doomed.

It's doomed because the storms are coming. Life is full of difficulty and hardship. Every human being faces hurt. People we love get sick and die. People we love hurt us and we don't always know why. Jobs fail. Financial difficulties come. We ourselves get sick and sad and lonely. All those things are part of the storm of life that sweeps over us here in this sinful world. Sometimes, it's only a little storm and it just tears a few shingles off the roof. But sometimes it's a tornado that threatens to flatten all that you are. If your foundation is sand – if you have built your life on anything other than Jesus – your house will fall. Your faith will die and you will spend eternity in hell. But if Christ and his work is the foundation, then your house, your life, is built on a rock and no storm of this life can shake it because the very power of God is holding your house up.

What's it going to be? Where will you build your house? That isn't just a question for you confirmands. It's a question for all of us here today. What are we building our lives on? The natural human tendency is to build on sand. We all want to be popular. We all want to be rich or at least comfortable. We all want to satisfy the whims and desires that come out of our hearts. Sure, we know about Jesus. Many of us went to schools like the one we have here. We go to church. But it's easy for us to let Jesus slip to being someone we only think about on Sunday. It's easy for us to pay lip service to serving Jesus when really we're all about serving ourselves and our sinful hearts. That sin has consequences in this life and in the life to come.

But that sinful heart is why Jesus came. That sinful heart is the one part of us that Jesus didn't share. His heart was perfect. He built his life on the rock of God and his promises. He did that for us. His perfect life and faith count for us. Then he died and he paid for all the times and all the ways that we built on sand. He died for our pride and our sin, for our ego that can only be satisfied when we're popular and rich. He died for the fact that we put those things ahead of God again and again. He paid for it all with his blood. And he rose to tell us that our sin is gone forever. We are holy and perfect in God's sight. That is the foundation. God came in that gospel and he gave us faith. So now, we have his power. We can build on the rock. The rock is Christ. It's his power that holds the house up. But it is up to us to build on him or to ignore our faith and build on the sand. By the power that God put in your heart when he gave you faith, build your house on the rock!

II.

But **how will you do that?** It's easy for me to tell you to build your house on the rock, but what does that look like in real life? Jesus says to us this morning, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”** You've heard the words. You confirmands have had the blessing of hearing those words your whole lives long. But Jesus says that just sitting there while I'm talking isn't enough. You have to put his words into practice. Living a life of faith is building your house on the foundation of Christ. What does that look like? Well, in just a minute, we're going to answer that question with a series of questions that I'm going to ask you to answer. When you give your answers, you will be confessing your faith and also making a promise to God to build your house on the rock.

The first question I will ask is simple, “Do you reject the devil with all his lies and empty promises?” Of course, you will answer yes. But think about what that simple question means. Do you recognize that the devil wants you to build your life on sand? Are you committed, before God, to rejecting the false promise of that sand, to rejecting all the false promises of life in a sinful world? Will you live your life for Christ instead? You're going to stand up here and say yes. Make sure that by the power of God, that really is your answer.

Then after asking you if you believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I'm going to ask you if you believe in all the books of the Bible and if you believe that Luther's Small Catechism has taught you what the Bible really teaches. No one can build on the rock without faith. It's only that faith which the Holy Spirit gave you that gives you any chance of living the life Jesus calls you to. You have that faith, so now you can make a commitment to God. So then I will ask you, “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it?” That is the foundation question. Will you cling to your faith for the rest of your life? Will you die rather than give it up? That's what it means to build your life on the rock. You are committed above all else to Christ.

Then I will ask, “Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word; to be faithful in the use of the Word and Sacrament; and in faith and action remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as long as you live?” That’s what a life built on the rock looks like. You hear the word regularly. You come to communion regularly. You live as you have been taught to live. You honor your father and mother. You respect the life and health of others. You keep yourselves free from sexual impurity. You respect the property of others. You use God’s gift of speech to build up and encourage, rather than to lie and tear down. And you are content with what God has given you. From that, you go on to serving the Lord in your church and your home. You honor him by the way you confess your faith here and out there. All that is what you will swear before God that you will do. That oath really is a summary of what it means to build your house on Christ.

Will you live that Christian life? It’s kind of scary to face that question, isn’t it? You all know that you’re sinners. You know that you’ve sinned already today. Not one of us can really keep the oath that we make on the day of our confirmation. Yet, God calls us to make the oath, first of all, because Jesus did die and pay for all the ways that we have failed and will fail to live up to our confirmation promises. God has forgiven us for all those sins. And then in that forgiveness, God gives us real power to turn from sin and live for him. That is the Christian life. Every day, we recognize our sin and our failure. Every day we repent and we go to Jesus for forgiveness and we trust in his blood to take all our sins and failures away. Every day we recommit ourselves to living for him and we find power to do that in his love and sacrifice for us.

That is what it means to build your house on the rock. It means to build your life on Christ. Whether you choose to be pastors or teachers or engineers or nurses or plumbers or custodians, live your life for Christ. Confess your sins to him and trust in his forgiveness and strive every day to serve him. Do that in high school, in class and in all your activities. Do that with your friends and your family and as you begin to date and look for that future spouse. Do that when life hurts and when life is great. Focus on Christ. And he will hold you up no matter what hurricanes you face in the years to come. He will sustain your faith. And he will bring you home to heaven. Amen.