

Bennochy church 3 June 2018

It's not what we say. It's what we do that counts. How many times have we heard that? I think we have all been in the situation where we have spoken in support of something, sometimes with great passion, and then gone home and not done anything about it. At that moment, it was important to us, but somehow it was never translated into action. I must speak to my MP/ MSP/ councillor about that. That's not right, we need to do something about that, but the email / letter was never sent and the visit to the MPs surgery was never made. Over time, the passion fades. There are now new priorities. New issues that concern us and new promises are made. We need to do something about that. Maybe this time, we will get round to it!

The words of Jesus seem harsh. Promises are made, "Lord, Lord", I believe, but he says to them, you know what, it is action that counts. I have no doubt that some were simply saying what they thought God wanted them to say. In Israel at that time, there seems to have been an element, of what might be described as, 'ritualised religion'.

People went through the motions of what was expected. For example, they offered the right sacrifices at the right times of the year, and said the right words. Jesus says, that is no longer good enough! And even if they performed many miracles, if those actions were not backed up by a true knowledge of God.

If they were not really done in his name, that also was not good enough. And God's rebuke is powerful, *'I never knew you'*. These are harsh words for the people of God. Powerful irony, for those who considered only themselves, their nation, as the chosen people of God.

The Christian faith is all about relationship. It is more than a knowledge of God that motivates us to act. It has to be something deeply personal. It is not based on the cry, "Lord, Lord!", but on the fact that God knows us. There will always be the times when our motivation to act, fails us. We will feel guilty. I should have done that. I should have said something, but the moment is now past. Its gone. I don't believe this is what Jesus is talking about in this passage. There were some, who seemed to think they could almost 'deceive' God, with false words and actions. These harsh words of Jesus are for them.

Having said that, we are not off the hook! Let's not sit back and relax! We are people who hear the words of God and our responsibility is to respond to them. The question is, what are we building? Houses on rock, or houses on sand? Start singing, *"The wise man built his house upon the rock..."* (+ actions). We know the song. Echoes maybe from your younger days!

Within these words is a deep seated challenge. This is not the time nor place to define what is rock and what is sand. Let's use a shorthand, and say it is about obeying or not obeying God, and within our own conscience we will define what obedience is.

There are structures around the world that have endured. They have lasted for 1000s of years. Solid, well built. Still here, in spite of everything that the elements have thrown at them. I wonder how long our modern houses and shiny buildings will last?

The image that Jesus uses here, is of a house that represents' our faith, and the image points to what makes a house strong? In the story, the answer is clear. What makes a building strong, is its foundations.

One definition of foundation is this, *'the lowest load-bearing part of a building, typically below ground level'*. What a boring definition! Here is a better use of the word, *'These allegations are completely without foundation.'* The challenge to us is this, do we live lives of faith, without foundation? Sing, *The rains came down and the floods came up and the house on the sand fell down.*

In a world where the message of God is seen as largely irrelevant, what is God saying to us? Let me share just one statistic with you. The membership of the church of Scotland in 2006 was 504,000. Last year it had dropped to 336,000. What

role is God asking us to play? Are the foundations of the church built on sand, because we have chosen to build in the wrong place? They may be ancient foundations, but in our multicultural, multiethnic, and secular society, they are crumbling. In many places we are holding on by our finger tips.

The one thing we can never get away from is this, in this place, we are the people of God. No one else. We cannot pass that responsibility to anyone else. We cannot stand on an isolated rock and say, we're o.k., when clearly, it is not. The story of Jesus has to impact us at a personal level. If the 1st century Jewish nation were not doing a good job of what God was asking them, I don't believe our foundations today are any stronger.

Many of the stories and parables of Jesus were multilayered. This one is no exception. Jesus words cut to the very heart of who we are. What is the foundation of faith on which we stand? It also challenges us to think about, what is our place as part of the wider Body of Christ and what role do we play to make its foundations strong?

Underneath it all, is a message of hope. There is a foundation. It is not a myth. Built on the right place, that foundation is secure. Ultimately, God always offers us a choice. If you are a builder it might seem obvious! And we are asked to build. To build first the Kingdom of God, on earth. Let's do that first, and leave the rest to God. A Kingdom, not built on words, but on the rocks of justice, equality, compassion and hope. Not for tomorrow, but for today. Amen.

