

Jim Cochrane
Solid Foundations Sermon
June 13, 2021
First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest

I wanted to take a moment now just to personally thank all of our seniors – those ones here this morning who have helped us with worship today, and for those tuning in from home or wherever else you might happen to be. I want to thank you all for hard work and the leadership that you have provided to both the youth group and the entire First Presbyterian church community throughout your four years in the senior high program, but especially over the past year.

In planning for Senior Sunday this year, deciding on scripture, which is often the hardest part, was simple. In thinking about the impact these seniors have had on our church community and the entire Lake Forest community, a theme of “solid foundations” was obvious.

I feel like every conversation over the past few weeks I’ve had with someone I haven’t seen in some time has begun with looking at each other and saying, “Whew, what a year, right?” But that is because it *has* been a strange, challenging, isolated year; a year that has forced us to look at what we’ve been doing and how we’ve been living, and reevaluate everything. As things begin to reopen and life seemingly begins again, economies, businesses, churches, and yes even youth groups are looking to rebuild some things that have been lost or disturbed by this pandemic. I am grateful however because as I begin to look to the future of the First Presbyterian youth groups, a task that very easily could have been terrifying if the group had crumbled apart during a year of isolation and Zoom fatigue, I am excited by the energy and life that exists within the Senior High Youth Group, due in no small part to the leadership of these seniors.

People don’t know this, but ironically enough my dad and I have spent the past few days building a little wooden 7-foot by 7-foot garden shed in my backyard. In the style of my family however, everything in the construction process has to be absolutely perfect. Getting everything perfectly level and square, to the point where getting something within 1/32nd of an inch is “eh, close enough.” This afternoon’s agenda is raising the walls and beginning to assemble the roof, but I have a feeling that’s going to go quickly. The hardest part without question was building up the base, getting it just right. To avoid eventual frost heaving we first dug out an entire square where the shed will stand, bought gravel, spread it out, raked it, tamped it down solid, readjusted, got the runners just right, realized we had messed up and relevelled the base again before we ended up with a base that was labelled, “close enough.”

But all of that work was important though. We knew that if the base was off, not level or not square, the shed wouldn’t be right and wouldn’t stand up to the forces of nature that it will sit in eventually.

I am certain Jesus, the carpenter, had this core construction principle in mind when he offered the challenge in today's scripture. There are two kinds of faith he says: a personal faith in having an individual relationship with God and Christ Jesus, and a social faith, in which you live out your faith every day of your life. We hear the words of Christ, his message of loving one's enemies, of selflessness, of caring for those around you, but we also know it can be easy to ignore those calls sometimes. Foolish is the builder who builds his house on the sand – as soon as the winds and rains come, that shifting, unstable, unpacked foundation will give way, and that house is going to fall down.

But wise is the builder who does the hard work – the nitty gritty work – who arrives at the construction site early and starts digging through the sand, cutting through the errant roots, recognizing them as being unsuitable as a base. Wise is the builder who takes the long way, who finds just the right flat stones, levels them, packs them together, and builds a solid, sturdy foundation. The winds, rains and floods come, but that rock has been prepared just for that purpose, and the house does not budge.

If we live our lives hearing the Word of God but not ready to live it out in our daily lives, our faith will crumble too at the first hardship. But if we hear the word of God and let it transform our living, we begin to pack down those rocks, square things perfectly, and we'll be able to weather each and every storm that is thrown at us.

These seniors have gotten practice building a foundation, living out the service to others that Jesus preaches in the Bible on our annual Work Trips. With each roof that gets re-shingled and each deck that gets built, that foundation gets a little more solid. But the work is not done, seniors, not by a long shot! Living out your calling from God is a lifelong task and something that requires constant upkeep. You have had a great start here at First Presbyterian, building a personal relationship with Christ and hearing the will of God, and even gotten experience acting on them, but it is now also largely in your hands. You will get to see how your personal understandings about God and Jesus transform and influence your life and your actions, and similarly you will get to see how your actions and the way you walk through the world impacts how you understand the Trinity. It's the digging, packing, and levelling of the foundation that is the hard work, but it is the surest way to deepen and strengthen your faith and your life. And we as a congregation will be with you every step of the way, offering encouragement and support, ready to pray, worship, celebrate, mourn, and wonder right alongside you.