

The Wise and Foolish Builders
LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church
Aug. 26, 2018 – AM Sermon
Rev. Peter Jonker
Luke 6:46-49

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike blew through southeastern Texas. The powerful category 2 hurricane had winds of 110 miles per hour and it made a mess of the area around Galveston. Particularly hard hit was the community of Gilchrist, Texas. Gilchrist was a lovely town filled with beautiful Gulf-side homes, most of them seasonal places where people came during the summer to escape the inland heat. If you can picture the sort of homes associated with Cape Hatteras or Gulf Shores Alabama – the ones with wood shingling and nice porches, painted in pastel colors, built up on pilings – then you'll have a good picture of what Gilchrist looked like. Upscale and picturesque. These homes spread out over a long spit of land, an extended peninsula that stretched out into the gulf. When Ike came through it blew in a great big wall of water, a storm surge that crashed against that community. The flood rose and the waters burst against the homes, and the results were devastating. Its destruction was complete. When the storm was over and the waters receded, the evacuated residents returned home. A remarkable sight greeted them. 99% of the town was gone. The peninsula had been covered in beautiful homes, but the wind scraped it clean. The storm left only broken foundations and twisted wreckage. Except for one house. In the middle of the destruction one home still stood. It was the home of Pam and Warren Adams. All the other houses were washed away but when the torrent struck that house, it could not shake it. This one house stayed strong in the storm. The email the church office sent out on Thursday had a picture of this home standing by itself. It's a remarkable picture. Every other home is completely gone; this home is completely there.

Can you see why this story came to mind when I read Jesus' words in our passage? This is the parable in real life. The Adam's house, standing all by itself is a picture of our parable. Not only is this a picture of our parable; that's a picture of who I want to be. When I hear Jesus talking about those storms, I think of the Adam's house standing tall and I think, 'That's who I want to be in this world. I want to be a person who can stand in the storms of life. I want to be the kind of person who can stay strong even when torrents of adversity and hurricanes of trouble pound against my foundations!' And I'll bet that's a picture of who you want to be too. We all want to be people of emotional and spiritual strength in our times of crisis.

This may be who we want to be, but is that who we really are?? It's hard to know. Until the trouble actually comes, until the storm actually blows, how do you know if you'll be able to stand? That's one of the things Jesus' parable tells us. You don't know the strength of your Spiritual house until the trouble comes. Before the storm all those homes in Gilchrist Texas looked great! They looked strong and firm. If you would have walked through the neighborhood a week before the hurricane, you wouldn't know how they'd react in the storm. And so it is with us. We all look strong and respectable, but when the storm comes, how will we fare?

I remember when I was 22 and doing some graduate work in Toronto, I had a storm moment that revealed some things about myself. There was a fellow student in our class who was an epileptic. We didn't know that. He never told us. But one day after class, there were about 10 of us standing around talking when he fell to the floor and went into a rather violent seizure. We had no idea what was going on. We didn't know he was an epileptic. For all we knew he was dying. The seizure only lasted a few minutes and soon he was on his feet again,

trying to gather himself. What was interesting though was the way that the ten of us reacted in that crisis moment. Some of the people screamed and leapt back in something like panic. Some of the people ran away looking for help. Some people went into detachment mode; they just stood there with wide eyes and didn't do much of anything. Only one very impressive person reacted by moving toward the victim and putting an arm around him and trying to help him and sooth him. I wasn't that person. I was one of the ones who went into detachment mode. I just stood there stunned, and, if I'm honest, I felt a little faint afterwards. Not exactly a rock in the storm.

We would like to think of ourselves as that strong house, but how do we know? We love the story of the Good Samaritan and we would like to think that in the time of crisis we would be like the Samaritan. We would stop and help the injured person moaning in the ditch. But maybe we are more like the priest and the Levite; the 'deeply religious' people who just walked right by. We love the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German pastor who stood up to the evil of the Nazis, to the point of martyrdom. He was a rock. He was the last house standing! We like to think we would be on his side! But how do we know we wouldn't end up being like the vast majority of German Christians who cheered the Nazis on. Unfortunately, in the story of Christianity, in the story of church history, the truth is that, for most of us, when the floods rise and the winds beat against our house, our house falls, and great is its destruction. How can we be the sort of people who stay strong in the storm? Well, what does Jesus say? Jesus makes it very clear why one house stands in the flood while the other falls. It's all about the foundation. One house is built on sand, with a weak foundation. The other is built on rock and its foundation is dug down deeply. It's all about building a good foundation. Jesus also tells us how we might go about digging a good foundation. Jesus says you dig a foundation with the things you do.

"Everyone who comes to me and hears my word and puts it into practice is like a man who built a house and dug down deep and laid the foundation on the rock." You dig the foundation when you DO God's word. Putting God's word into practice is what sends your foundation deep into the rock. I know we Protestants like to talk about faith more than works, but the parable is clear: the doing is the digging. How do our actions dig a foundation? Well, we know how that works. It's the things we do, especially the things we do repeatedly, the things we put into practice, that give us a foundation, that anchor our lives. That's how it works for any craft. The foundational skills for any craft are laid by hours and hours of practice. You coach a soccer team and the kids always want to scrimmage: Coach, can we play a game? Can we scrimmage? But you can't give into that as a coach. You have to make them practice passing the ball. You have to make them practice trapping the ball. You have to make them practice heading the ball. You have to make them dribble the ball in and out of the little orange cones over and over and over again. Because those skills give your players a foundation in the game. And, just as in Jesus' parable, they need a foundation precisely for times of stress and pressure. When that big moment comes in the game when the ball is crossed and they will have a chance to head it in the goal, they won't succumb to the pressure, they will react in just the right way. Hearing the words of the coach and putting them into practice will give you a foundation that holds up in the storm.

So we do have this sense of how actions dig foundations in our life. But Jesus seems to be interested in a specific kind of action. It's especially the unseen actions. Foundations are below the surface, right? You can't see them. It's the small, daily, unseen actions that dig our roots. It's not the great public acts that anchor us, those are the above ground things. They can be deceptive. Remember, from the street both houses in Jesus' parable look exactly the same. It's the unseen stuff that matters. It's the small, daily things we do that dig our foundations. The

young mother getting up early in the morning so she can have a few moments of solitude to breathe deeply and talk to God before she gets swamped by her children's demands; she's digging a foundation. The busy professional, taking time out during her lunch hour to read a few chapters from Romans and doing her best to understand it and only half getting it, but really trying, she's digging a foundation. The middle aged man works in a toxic workplace. His co-workers are crude and profane. The business is cutthroat. Morale is bad – sometimes it feels like half the office conversation involves tearing down someone else. “Can you believe her? What is her deal? I can't stand her!” It wears him out. But he's trying to be a light in that place, so every day, before he gets out of his car and goes into the office, he takes a deep breath and says, “*God is my refuge and my strength, an ever present help in trouble, therefore I will not fear.*” He's digging a foundation. When it comes to building our homes, everyone loves to upgrade the finishes, the new kitchen countertop! The new bathroom vanity! We don't like to think about the crack in our basement foundation, the rotting joist in the basement. But real strength is built in those places. *It's all the daily unseen things that we do to place our life under the Lordship of Christ that give us the sort of foundations that stand up in storms.*

So what sort of shape is your foundation in? When the storm comes, will the house of your life hold? For myself, I hope that when the storm comes I will be like the Adams house after Hurricane Ike. I hope that I've done some digging and served my Lord and practiced my faith in such a way that I will be standing after the flood. But I don't know that. I really don't. I know there are some leaky spots in me and a few windows where the draft blows in. I'm pretty sure there's some settling going on. I know there are parts of me that are not up to code. I'm guessing that's the state of your house too. How will my leaky, leaning house of our life hold up against the torrent? Lord, I do not know.

Here's what I do know. Jesus is talking to his disciples here, and at the end of his ministry all these men will all be caught in a storm. It will be an unholy flood. The powers of evil will rise up in a torrent against Jesus and his followers. The powers of evil will take hold of Jesus and arrest him. And despite all their fancy promises about sticking with him, all the disciples will abandon him and flee and Jesus will be the only one left standing. The storm of trouble will come, the disciples houses will all be swept away, and only Jesus' house will be standing, his body lifted up on the cross for the sins of the world. So that picture of the Adams house standing by itself, strong and intact, after Hurricane Ike – I don't know if that's a picture of me. I do know this is a picture of Jesus. He is the one still standing. He is the still point in the hurricane. He is the anchor in the flood. He is my refuge and my strength. The forces of hell smashed themselves against him but they did not prevail.

So, I will try to dig my foundation as deep as I can. I will try to not just hear Jesus' words but act on them too. I will do the best I can to be a servant of my Lord. But when I run out of energy, when I don't understand what in heaven's name is going on anymore, when the storm is blowing and I feel my house starting to collapse, I will cling to him. I will come to his house, I will knock on his door, and he will open it and see me, wet-through, worn-out, and afraid. And he will take me in, he will give me new dry clothes to wear, and he will seat me at his table, and he will feed me. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. May we all build good homes with strong foundations. May we all find our true home the house of our Lord.