

BUILD ON SOLID FOUNDATION

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Jesus told a little story about the man who built his house upon a rock as over against the fellow who built his house on sand to make the very real point that, if your life is built on a false or eroded or insufficient foundation, it will collapse. In the life of catastrophe or stress points, your life will inevitably fall like a house of cards under stress if it is founded on a foolish or insufficient foundation. This is a very true fact. Just about everybody in this world attempts to found his life on an insufficient foundation. The classic one of course used to be men who thought that their careers actually had any value or somehow that their careers were anchors in a chaotic life. You actually had this huge belief that your career was significant or important. And anyone who has ever done that is rudely awakened at some point or another.

The story I always like to use is the movie, The Swimmer, with Burt Lancaster. It was written by John Cheever who was a member of our parish in Westchester years ago. It describes a man, a securities guy in New York City. He tries to swim across Westchester County through his friends' swimming pools. He swims from Stanford in Fairfield County over to Briarcliff in Westchester through his friends' swimming pools and manages to complete his journey. However, along the way we find that his old mistresses and girlfriends have dumped him, his career is in shatters, his reputation is destroyed. His wife has left him. He has lost the regard of his teenage daughters. He finally arrives in a very passionately filmed scene where he comes to his house which is now foreclosed, a massive house in Westchester on a hill. The heavens come with a thunderstorm and he is completely and totally undone by the complete end of all his dreams and illusions. So it is a fun movie called The Swimmer.

Careerism is one of these, if you build your house on it, it inevitably falls to sand. You know, the funny thing is that women are now accepting the lie. It is the most interesting phenomenon, that what none could have told them, women are now believing. I want to quote from the headline from this week's The Onion. The Onion is a college humor newspaper that is free. You can get it on Connecticut Avenue right next to the Post Office. The main story in this week's The Onion, a humor magazine, is this:

“Gender in America Report: Women, increasingly choosing dead end careers over dead end relationships. (It is dated College Park, Maryland.) A study, which surveys 477 female recent college graduates, found that young women were 23% more likely than any previous generation to seek dissatisfaction in the professional world rather than empty romantic partnerships. Dr. Detwiler of the University of Maryland suggests that there is a cultural sea change as to how women choose to experience lifelong disappointment. “

What men have known for generations women are now just going to have to find out. If you think that your identity can be anchored or founded on a career, I don't have to tell you that that will soon come to you and I speak to you as one who has had two hugely coveted jobs – two jobs – not this one, but two jobs that all of my colleagues would have died for. In wonderful sanctified church life. And I see them as they are – an exercise in complete futility. Now, so, what women are going to find out, men have learned through people like John Cheever.

It's not just a through a job. If you put all your eggs in the basket of a man, as women used to do, that's a dead end. If you have ever completely, totally, fused with woman in your romantic ideals of self-aspiration, you will be totally disappointed. And if you have ever fused with your child, if any of you have put huge emotional sense of completeness or a sense of fusion or associatedness with your children, that is one of these houses built upon sand because the child that is fused in that way will inevitably leave you. It is absolutely without question just as you left your parents when that kind of pressure was given. But if the foundation of somebody's life is built on your performance, you are going to have to move to Oregon. There is no choice. So, if you put your fusion on a job, male or female, or if you put your fusion on a man or a woman, or if you put some kind of fusion on a child, it is a foundation that will fall apart when it is severely undercut and the cord is rent by a loss.

Now, what then is the foundation based upon the rock? What is the foundation based upon the rock? I can deconstruct all day long upon foundations based upon sand and human beings. What is the foundation that Jesus has in mind when He speaks about the foundation built upon the rock?

Well, He hints at it in earlier sections of the Sermon on the Mount when He talks about inwardness. He says, for example, that adultery is not as important as the thought that led to it, and that thievery is not as significant as the thieving, greed and envy that led to it and that the fruit of the tree start with the tree. He always looks for the inward drama out of which the external act comes. And what He finds is that the rock is two great things and this is the second half of this short sermon.

The rock consists of two things. The first one is that the rock consists of a love that is without judgement. The rock upon which people's lives can survive chaos and catastrophe and loss is the rock that is based on non-judgmental loving. If you are a person who had a father or a mother who were hard on you, as most people have, that's normal. If you had a hard driving critical and captious parent as most people have, that creates a kind of deep insecurity and sandy foundation that makes everybody always anxious all the time for some kind of thing that they hope will block them out. If you are one of the maybe few who had a mother or a father who loved you without criticism and, I want to be very clear, I am talking about love without criticism. I reject the idea that love includes criticism. That is a false idea. Love that is received is love that does not have criticism in it. You know this because people who say they love you but criticize you, you will not stay with. You will not stay with a husband who passionately asserts that this is for your own good. You will not stay with a parent who passionately tells you that "Son, I am going to whip you now but this is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you." Not true. It's going to hurt you more than it hurts me.

Love, to be love in the Christian sense, must be initiated without judgement and criticism. And you know that is true because people who judge you, you avoid – forever and ever – Mom, Dad, sister and brother, boss, former husband. The power of this is that those fortunate ones who have received love without judgement are people who have an astonishingly strong foundation. A couple of you had it, not many but for those of you who did, it was worth its weight in gold.

We are told that God loves us without criticism. His love is the love for the unrighteous, not for the righteous. In short, "I came not to bring the righteous but I came to bring sinners to repentance and that kind of love is a rock. You know, I can sit up here and affirm Christian values and affirm the roots of society in Christianity until the cows come home but, until I say what that means, it's just a head trip. And what it means is that love, without judgement, builds up and judgement destroys. And love without judgement, whether it is coming to you or whether it is coming through you to someone else, saves your child. It saves your child. That child will, in fact, be yours forever if a judgement of this kind exists.

The last part of this rock is a rock which the Christian faith brings with enormous security and with great power because Christian believing says that not only is the grace of God that is love without judging a formation of a rock but the other rock in life is to be able to understand a person's wounds as the gift of God.

Let me explain what I mean. You think that the world you received is the worst thing about your life. You think that the hand that you were dealt, the

particular thing that made your life a defeated life is the worst thing about your life. And you are constantly trying to find a successful alternative to that. Jesus said that when I die, I live. And when I give my life I receive it. And the interesting thing about reality in Christian faith is that the thing about you that is the worst is always the best. The thing about you that is the most pained, the thing about you that is the most shameful, the fact that you served a prison sentence long ago, the fact that your father served a prison sentence, the fact that your mother committed suicide, the fact that you lost your father at an early age, the fact that your career took a 180 into trash collection -for Montgomery County.

You know I love the Rockville channel by the way. I live for the Rockville channel. I fall out when I hear about snow removal in the middle of June.

Now, what I want to comment on though is that the yearning that was in your life, that you regard as the greatest defeat that you ever suffered, is the cross from which everything grows. This is why I think Peter became Saint Peter. He was a recidivistic coward whose ethical compass was so completely trumped by his own need to protect himself that he not only denied Jesus three times, but five times in the New Testament. And Jesus said, "Great, you have denied me five times, I will make you Head of the Church. That is the essence of the Gospel – Peter being the Head, not James, Peter. Five times you let me down. Five strikes, you're out. One strike, you're out. I am going to make you Head of the church.

Now that powerful message makes rocks. People who have assimilated their negativity and are not in constant tiring exhausting flights from negativity are people who are like rocks.

So, what have I said? This is just for you. As for me, I certainly have worked in the past. The foundations of sand are primarily created by putting your hopes in career, in a man, or in a child. And these very well intended types of foundations end up in profound shock later. When you are alone. The alternative to that is a life that is based on love without judgement and the view that Jesus Christ is present in the wound. And that changes the entire landscape and the entire past and the entire future. Try it, you will like it. And if you actually believe what I say and what is being said here, all of you will go into the ordained ministry or give up everything and be loving creative individuals.

Let us pray: Dear God, I wish you wouldn't deconstruct our lives but we didn't ask for this and it is the way it is and, in this new creation that you have opened up, help us to hear your love of us when we are a mess that takes no statistics of evil but loves us in the mess and then by your grace helps those things which are terrible to become occasions of grace for hope and for new love of others. Amen