

July 3, 11 Matthew 7:24-27

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

Foundations are very important in our lives. Whether it's the foundation of a structure, the foundation of our faith, or even the foundation of our country, foundations are important. This weekend we celebrate the birth of our country. For this generation and many more to come it might be just another holiday and at times a long weekend, or even the start to summer vacations. But to those in 1776 it was the setting of a new foundation for the new America with new liberties 'and justice for all.' From the time that Paul Revere went about yelling "The British are coming" until the final volley of shots, this country began to experience a new foundation of what we are all about. Through Washington, Franklin, Hamilton and the other representatives a new way of life was forged ahead birthing our Bill of Rights and our Constitution. The Preamble of our Constitution begins, "*We the people*" and ends, "*do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*" Over these years the foundation of this great country has stood the test of times and we today celebrate another birthday and we salute those who have fought and died for it, from the farm communities in New England to the shores of Tripoli, to the battles in Iraq and Afghanistan. We salute those who have served and have preserved our freedoms, whether in the armed forces or in congress or those who have been its leaders as president. Though we are not a perfect nation, and they aren't perfect people, we are the United States of America built upon the foundations developed by men who had a vision of freedom for all people. When we say the "The Pledge of Allegiance" we are reaffirming our vow as Americans that we believe in its principles and will obey its laws, so help me God.

Our faith has a strong foundation. Our closing hymn begins, *“How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word! What more can he say that to you he hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”*

The Bible is our foundation for it is God’s Word given to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Timothy writes, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuke, correction and training in righteousness, so **that** the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

As people of God the very foundation of our faith teaches the great love of God so that we might know how to live in this world and how to prepare to live in the next. The very foundation of our faith comes to us through God’s Son who came to give us abundant life in this life and eternal life with him for all eternity. Sometimes I hear people say it doesn’t matter what you believe. I have to disagree with them because it does matter what you believe. What you believe concerns where you are going to spend eternity. Christianity is not a ‘pie-in-the-sky’ religion. It costs someone something. It cost God’s only son. It cost those first Christians their lives being tossed to the lions because of what they believed. Years ago some people tried to shake the very foundation of our faith by saying that God was dead. That theory was taught in Universities to professors who would teach in seminaries across this world. The very foundation of our faith was challenged. The philosophy of that time was the Bible might be a good book, but it was questioned as relevant for today’s world. Out of that came a revival which proved that God was very much alive. People realized God wasn’t dead. The Bible was relevant for today and He was still transforming lives. Throughout the years the belief in God, prayer in school and sports events has been challenged. Funny thing is this, they still have a chaplain who opens Congress with prayer and prays at special events. Just checked it out on the internet. Even the Bible has been challenged yet it has stood the test of time.

Foundations. They need to be strong to hold up when storms or troubles come. In the book of Matthew we have the great teachings of Jesus called the Sermon on the Mount beginning in chapter 5 all the way to the end of chapter 7. It begins with the Beatitudes about how one is blessed, talks about what we should be and then it goes into how we should live our lives. These teachings were heard not only by his newly called disciples but people who were drawn to Jesus. It was the beginning of his ministry and we might say these chapters were the foundation of his ministry. He came with newness of God's word. In a time of great depression being under Roman Rule and a king who was like a puppet and priests who were corrupt, Jesus' word struck hope in the lives of a people that "God wasn't dead" that he cared for them, that he had not forgotten them at all. "Happy are" Jesus began his message. That's why they sat in amazement listening to words that would change their lives. "Remember the foundations of your faith" Jesus could have been saying to them. "Remember that God loves you. Remember how your ancestors came forth out of Egypt. Remember what they went through while there as they suffered under a Pharaoh that did not know the beloved Joseph. God was with them all the time and heard their prayers to be set free. Remember how God parted the Red Sea so they could escape Pharaoh's army. Remember how God provided food and drink for their 40 year journey in the wilderness until they were prepared to enter that place of promise. Remember the commands God gave them that exists today for all God's people, rules to live by...rules that aren't so much of 'do not's' but rules that protect you from falling into false beliefs and being swayed by others you will mingle with in the new land I shall give you." It's love God....love your neighbor. Nothing changed for us.

Now I know Jesus might not have said those things that day but I think he could have so that the people would remember the very foundation, the core of their belief that they came from. And so their faith would be touched once again he brought them words of hope and courage. Jesus was not bringing new thinking, but revival of the old, and a

deeper understanding of God's word to the people. He reminded them about God's Holy Commands though not saying "Listen to the 10 Commandments given to Moses." He did it as only Jesus could, to a new generation of those who were struggling reminding them the Words of God were not only for their ancestors, but for them and their families as well. They too were in bondage like their ancestors though they weren't in Egypt. God had given them a deliverer that had come to lead them to the Promised Land once more, but this time it would take a sacrifice and a cross and an empty tomb. Let him who has ears, hear the word of the Lord. Nothing has changed.

These very foundations are the foundations on which our Christian faith stands today. A song that came into being after 911 said something about 'you must stand for something or you will fall for anything.' There is a lot of truth in that. You got to know what you believe. We must remember the core foundation that should be anchored to the very depth of our being. The very foundation of your faith is often challenged and if your foundation is shaky or cracked, so will your faith, and perhaps your trust in God will begin to go away. When troubles come you don't turn away from God, you should turn to be closer to God. Jesus didn't take the disciples out of the storms; he came to them in their storms and brought peace. The promise that came from Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel is this... "He would be with us always." Doesn't that mean in the good times and the bad? God never promised a rose garden. He just promised his presence. He never promised we wouldn't suffer or have troubles, he just promised to be with us always. And by the way, have you ever noticed the thorns among the roses? Interesting!

Just think of all those who we read about in God's Word. People who came through thick and thin. Even the disciples were a group of uneducated men who struggled with walking with Jesus. Their faith walk was a roller coaster ride much like some of us. There were days they were on top of the world, and then there were days they were in the valley.

They could rejoice when on the mountain top and they could look up when in the valleys and they would see the same God watching over them. Seems like a normal life for some of us.

So we have the stories in Scripture to help us solidify our faith. Then we have people who have shared their faith through writing books, hymns, sharing their stories. You don't read the Bible once and think you know it all. You read it again and again for it is the living word of God that continues to teach us daily the things of God. The stories never change but their application might. It's God's word for God's people so that they might understand his ways and remain faithful to the very end. They are words of encouragement, correction, forgiveness, transformation and hope. Though some might want to interpret them to their own beliefs it is then you need to allow the Holy Spirit to teach you what you need to know.

Each Sunday morning we hear God's voice in order for us to believe in him so that we will trust him. He isn't way out there. He is right here. When we leave this place we call a church he doesn't stay here, he goes with us. You do not go anywhere that God doesn't go with you. He is your shadow, so to speak. It's like the old song, "Me and my shadow." Never mine "Me and Molly McGee." It's me and Jesus. He is there to assist you. And the closer the walk, the closer you will feel his presence.

In just a few moments we will be celebrating Holy Communion, another foundation of our faith. It was there in the Upper Room he gave his disciples the promise that one day he would come back to take them to be with him for all eternity. That promise is remembered over and over again each time we receive communion whether it be in this church or someplace else. Holy Communion reminds us of God's presence with us, that he never will forsake us, and that those who seek forgiveness shall find it. That is one reason we celebrate Holy Communion for it is the gathering around the table of Grace to receive

Jesus Christ to remind us that he “walks with us, and talks with us, and he tells us we are his own.” His death and rising is the foundation of our faith. And those who believe in him will rise with him to new life....God said it...I believe it!

Foundations. You need them. Whether it is the foundations of our country or the foundations of our faith, we must know what we believe. For if you don't have a firm foundation you will fall for anything.

Hear now God's word for all of us today. It will give you something to think about not only today but for days when things are tough.

Hear ye! Hear ye! Jesus says to all of us

*“Therefore, (which means listen up) everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. 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.** But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

The final verse of our closing hymn goes:

The soul that on Jesus leans for repose, I will not, I will not desert to its foes; that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I', never, no, never, no, never forsake.”

Who is the wise this morning amongst us? Who are the foolish?