

# Building on Rock

a sermon preached on the

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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at

## St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Deuteronomy 11: 18-21, 26-28; Matthew 7: 21-29

God's Word provides a rock-like foundation for our lives. However, it is not enough to listen to it - we have to try to live by it.

The reading from Deuteronomy stresses the blessings that God's people will receive provided they obey the Word of God, and, in the Gospel, Jesus says that those who make his teaching the firm basis of their lives will be able to withstand all assaults and temptations. It is very easy for us to appear to be pious and fail to do the Will of God.

To build on the rock means to be a hearing, responding disciple of Christ, not a phony superficial one. Practicing obedience becomes the solid foundation to enable us to weather the storms of life. Most people do not deliberately seek to build their lives on a fragile or inferior foundation, but rather they just do not give much thought and attention to their life's purpose.

Therefore, part of our responsibility as believers is to help others stop and think about where their lives are headed, walking a little of their journey with them so that they may, hopefully, see the light of Christ in our hearts. That does not mean that we, as believers, always get it right. Far from it! However, we have recognized the foundation on which to build, as we strive to obey God's Word, and by doing so, enable others to hear the message of Christ.

"Striving to obey the Word of God". "Walking in the footsteps of Christ". These two statements remind me of a situation I was in approximately eleven years ago. It was prior to my ordination as a deacon. There was a lot of paperwork to be seen to prior to ordination, and one document in particular was of great concern to me. I was requested to obtain the signatures of three members of Synod who would testify that...."JAMES EDWARD MCKENNA WAS LIVING AN EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN LIFE". A bit of a problem, I can tell you! Who in the history of humanity, apart from Jesus himself, lived an exemplary Christian life? So, with great difficulty, I managed to get the diocesan hierarchy to change the wording, for me, to read.....JAMES EDWARD MCKENNA WAS ENDEAVOURING TO LEAD A CHRISTIAN LIFE. A big difference! But one I could live with – and I am sure God was much happier also!

Jesus said his disciples would be judged not by their words, but by their deeds. There is only one way a person can prove their sincerity and that is by their practice. Christ says "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like the wise person who builds on the rock". However, there are lots of other voices which, directly or indirectly, tell us to build our lives on very different values. These say something like this.....

1. If you want to get on in life, look after your own interests as nobody else will.
2. Never question whether something is right unless it benefits you yourself.
3. Be ambitious.
4. Throw your weight around – it doesn't matter how many people you hurt to enable you to achieve your goal.
5. Life is a rat-race.
6. Get to know the people who matter.
7. Grease a few palms long the way.
8. Don't concede an inch to anyone who could stand in your way.
9. Try to project the image of a successful person, even when things are far from well. Just don't let

- on.
10. Don't hesitate to raise your hat to God if you think that will help you.
  11. Keep up the façade of outer religious observance.

What Christ says to us is very different.

Remember this. The most important thing in life is to be a person of integrity.

“Build on the following foundations”:

1. We are not rats, so don't behave like one. We are children of God.
2. The most important thing about us is our capacity for goodness.
3. If we raise our status, make sure we raise ourselves also.
4. What sense does it make if we work hard at our career but we don't work on our character.
5. What does it matter for us to be always in the limelight if our soul is in darkness.
6. Take care of our conscience and listen to it.
7. Without sacrifice and struggle we can never grow and discover who we are.
8. Be faithful to our promises.
9. To live loosely is discover, sooner or later, that we haven't anchored our boat to anything solid and when the storm strikes, we will find ourselves adrift and alone.
10. We should not be ashamed of our beliefs and values.

These are some of the foundations on which Christ teaches us to build our lives. To listen to His words and not endeavour to live by them would be like carrying an unlit lamp, walking in darkness and floundering in the shifting sand.

References: Matthew 7: 21-29  
Deuteronomy 11: 18-21, 26-28  
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