

Put Into Practice What Jesus Teaches

May 25, 2008

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

I want to depart from the Lectionary this (evening) (morning) and focus on something else. Every book I've ever read about preaching, every lecture I had to attend on preaching all say it's important to end the sermon on a positive note. Give your listeners something to feel good about, something positive they can do in their lives.

It's strange then that the Sermon on the Mount, which Matthew has pieced together from the sayings of Jesus, ends the way it does. It reads, *Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was its fall!* (Mt.

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7:24-27) Bummer. I'm afraid Jesus would have flunked Preaching 101.

People who build their lives actually *seeking* to put into practice what Jesus teaches are like those who build their houses on a solid foundation. Notice I said *seeking*, because Jesus does not imply that any of his disciples perfectly conform their lives to his teaching, but that's their great aim. That's what they're all about.

There are a couple of things we need to notice. First, Jesus does not say that people who build their lives on obedience to his word will not have troubles, or storms that shake their lives to the very foundation. The fact is, the storms of life will hit the committed disciples of Jesus just as well as those who are merely "all ears." Obedience to Jesus' words is not a protection *from* troubles; it's a protection *in* troubles. A solid

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foundation does not prevent storms, it keeps the house standing.

The second thing to notice is that, in the end, the house stands through the storm. That's all. It stands. Jesus does not say that a house built on the solid rock of his words will, for example, glow like a Thomas Kincaid painting, or miraculously turn into a mansion, or be in any way particularly impressive. The only thing impressive about this house, this life of doing and not just hearing, is that after the storm calms down, the house is still standing. The way to survive the storms of life is to be *doers* of Jesus' word.

The difference between the two houses lies in the difference in the lives of those who occupy the houses. The one that withstood the storm could be the hovel of some humble, unsung, obedient disciple. The one that crashed down could have been the house of a Christian who finds that the words of Jesus are

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important, memorable, beautiful to hear, but not realistic to live by, or, most commonly of all, just too hard.

We know, of course, that our faith and hope are not external structures. Far from it. And we are not, in fact, a house, but human beings created to bring God glory. Within all the limitations of this familiar parable, we find enough sterling wisdom to take it as our guide for life. In every choice we make, there is ground to be taken for either stability or collapse in our life of faith.

So, Jesus' sermon ends with a dire warning, but we should remember that we only give warnings to people because we care about them. This warning of Jesus is nothing if it is not a warning of genuine love to all those in any age who would be his disciples.

AMEN.