

A Rock Solid Foundation
(An Experiential Sermon)
The Rev. Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
The Third Sunday of Pentecost, Proper 4, Year A, RCL
June 1, 2008

(Props needed: One large Rock, one bowl/container of sand, small amount of water; a basket of polished rocks for end of sermon)

Gather children up front:

Let's look at the sand....blow on it: what happens? It moves pretty easily, right? Now, let's pour some water on it: do you see how the water moves the sand around, makes a hole in the sand? And when we touch it, what happens? Even a very light touch leaves behind the impression of our finger, it shifts easily.

Now let's look at the rock...do you think it will be harder to move? Yes? Let's try it: everyone blow on the rock together—blow hard! Did it move? No? What do you think will happen if we pour water on it? (pour water)—did anything happen to the rock, besides it getting wet? No, it's still the same shape. And if you touch the rock, does it change shape? Does your finger leave behind a dent like it did with the sand? No.

Thanks for helping.

Now Jesus says if we listen to his teaching and apply it in our lives, our spiritual life, our faith, will be like the house built on **the rock**. The winds may blow, and waters come—in other words, there will be stormy times in our lives—but we will be able to withstand them because we will be grounded in Christ. Our faith will not be pushed around by outside events.

But if we just hear what is said but don't apply it in our lives, we can become as easily changed as **the sand**. You noticed that the sand is softer and easier for us to shape and control, it

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responds to even light pressure. Like you can do on the beach, you can trace letters or shapes into it. If your faith is built on a foundation of sand, it too can be moved easily by the circumstances in our lives. **The storms will wash away our faith because it is not based on Christ or his teachings.**

And just what are his teachings?

Well, the passage we heard today is at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel.

It goes for 3 chapters and captures the essence of Jesus' ministry:

Trust in God, do not worry. Be a light to the world, forgive, and ask for forgiveness, work for reconciliation, refrain from judgment, speak honestly, give freely, and act in generous and loving ways, even towards our enemies.

It is in the Sermon on the Mount that we learn the **Lord's prayer**, and hear what we know as the **Beatitudes**—blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourning, the merciful, to name a few.

These teachings are not easy. No one ever said they are. But if we are to live as we are called to live, we need to put them into practice. **In fact, we have already promised to. Just turn to page 304 in the Book of Common Prayer and take a look at the baptismal covenant.** Now if you are in the Confirmation class, you are most likely quite well-versed in (and tired of) the baptismal Covenant, because it is brought up a lot. But here, summed up in a few questions, is the foundation of our faith.

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Now, the first three questions sound like our Nicene Creed, and deal with our belief in the Triune God: these are very important but today I want to focus on the next five questions:

- *Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers? This means coming together as a community to worship, share in the sacraments and praying for one another and the world—we are not meant to be Christians alone.*
- *Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? We are human and we will mess up; God does forgive us but it is important to ask for that forgiveness—it shows we recognize that we need help and cannot do this without God's help. We are also called to resist evil—not only in our own actions but also opposing the evil that happens in the world: discrimination, war, poverty, hunger.*
- *Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? We need to share our faith journey, our belief in God with others by telling them about it. We also need to show them what we believe by acting as Jesus has taught us to act.*
- *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? You are a child of God, and so is everyone else. You are to treat all persons with the same respect that you would show Jesus if he came to visit you. This can be hard, especially when dealing with someone you don't like—but remember, God loves them too.*
- *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? Striving means to 'work for'. We are to work to make the world a fair place, where everyone can find safety, work, food, shelter, adequate healthcare. Often this means sharing what we have. We are to remember that even those people who seem strange to us are people too.*

This is a foundation to build on—build our own spiritual house on, to build the church's mission on. A foundation that is rock solid.

Lastly, with all the time we spent blowing on the rock and seeking how it really doesn't react too much to water, let us not think that the outside things fail to affect that rock at all. They do—just like all the events of our lives affect us and shape us. However, they just do it more slowly, smoothing out the rough edges, polishing us to better reflect Christ's life and teachings. Just like these polished rocks (*hold up basket*). I invite each child to take one, and use it to remind yourself that to build your faith foundation on Jesus. Let it also remind you of how much you

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are loved—a love even stronger than the strongest stone. For our God is our crag and our stronghold—and it is only in knowing our Lord that we can live in safety.

Amen.