

Sermon February 20, 2011

1 Corinthians 3:10 – 23

Matthew 5:38-48

“A Good Foundation”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It's hard to believe that 2 weeks ago we are still digging out from the big storm. Now, after the warmer temperatures, the snow is all but gone. There may still be a few piles still hanging around, but they are considerably smaller. That snow did create a lot of work for city, township, county and state workers. Plowing, salting, tree trimming and many other tasks were required to open streets and remove all that snow. Some things were taken care of immediately, while others didn't get accomplished until a few days ago.

This past week, in the parking lot behind the offices where I work, end-loaders were removing piles of snow to reopen the last of the snowed in

parking spots. In the course of this activity, the scoops began to tear up large chunks of the pavement.

The problem seems to be an old section of concrete buried under the blacktop. It has created an uneven area in the pavement and the scoops from the plows have torn it up. Based on the size and shape of the concrete, it appears that this was once the foundation to a small garage or shed. The actual structure has long since been torn down, but the foundation has remained. Sometime over the past twenty years or more, that foundation was filled in and leveled over, then covered with a layer of asphalt. – but it's still there and it's still solid.

Now rewind approximately thirty years. My sister and her husband had purchased their first home in Warrenville. After their first year in that house, my brother-in-law was bound and determined to get rid of a large, square block of concrete from the back corner of their lot. Like that concrete in our office parking lot, this too was an old foundation to some kind of out-building.

As we were both significantly younger, and significantly less wiser, the plan was to take 5-lb. sledge hammers and basically beat that old foundation into rubble. Then, using a wheelbarrow, cart the rubble out to my pickup truck and then off to Uncle George's farm to dump it. We began early on a hot summer day, and it did not take us long to realize that this foundation wasn't going anywhere. At least not with us two yokels pounding away at it. After a couple of hours, all we had achieved was a series of chips and chunks knocked off the edges, and some damage to one of the corners. As far I know, that concrete beast still sits in the same place to this day.

Lesson learned? Concrete makes a good foundation – it's not going anywhere. Some have used cinder blocks, some stone and some brick, but for my bet, it's concrete – at least when it comes to constructing a building.

Today's sermon is based on both the Epistle reading from 1 Corinthians and the Gospel reading from Matthew. The Holy Word speaks much about good, solid foundations.

Saint Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is a letter to a church that is being torn apart due to arguments and fighting within the congregation. The

church that Paul had started, and Appollos, Cephas and others had built up, was in danger of dissolving. Groups were taking sides and each one was claiming their side to be the “correct” faction. They had lost sight of the sound doctrine that was their base, the foundation of their church.

Paul beautifully teaches and corrects this ancient church congregation, and every church congregation to this day, in his words from chapter 3.

10According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I (Paul) laid a foundation, and someone else (Apollos) is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Yes, the foundation of the Corinthian church, and every Christian church, is Jesus Christ. Period. He and He alone, is our strength, our righteousness and our salvation. Every thing we do is based, literally, on Him. Yes, the great evangelist Paul helped lay the foundation, but only by the Grace of God. Paul’s evangelizing and missionary work were simply the tools God used to lay the foundation of the Corinthian church.

Verse 12,

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Each one of these materials, the precious metals, jewels, wood, mud and straw were needed for the building - the fancy stuff to adorn the altar, the muddy stuff to create bricks and mortar, the hay to cover the roof. Each type of material was integral to the structure. Together, with hard work and toil, they became a church. But, in Corinth and as in any church, these materials would come under fire. Some of them would be consumed by the fire and some would survive. Some of the workmanship would remain, some would not be strong enough. But the foundation, Jesus Christ, would remain, and does to this day. Like the block of concrete that wouldn't budge under the blows of two yokels in Warrenville, our foundation, Jesus Christ will not be moved.

The fire that works to consume the church is the fire of Satan. There is

nothing the evil one hates more than a place where God dwells and is active - a place where the people of God come to worship and be in the Lord's presence. With a vast array of toils, tribulation and tumult, Satan and his forces burn away at the mud, straw, and gold of the Christian Church. They seek out the weaker workmanship, looking for any crack to chip away at. Here is where we need to stay anchored to our foundation. Because, as in the words of today's hymn, "the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord". We stay anchored in His Holy Word, His Sacraments and His Love.

We have been talking about building materials here, and using the actual building as a metaphor for the whole Christian Church. Those materials, the wood, straw, gold and silver are more than just hardware. They are the very church itself, and that church is actually built out of its very human members. Yes, you are the gold, silver and jewels. You are the mud, straw, wood and hay. That is exactly what Paul is telling the congregation at Corinth, that each member is part of the construction crew, adding their gifts and service to the building up of His Church. To start arguing over who may be silver and who may be mud is nonsense, for all the materials are integral to the church. And, as we see in verse 15, though some of our works may be burned up in the fire that Satan sends our way, we still are saved.

Picking up at verse 16,

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Paul makes it clear, all of us are God's temple, God's church. Through baptism, God's Spirit dwells in us! We are His church and we will stand against the toils that Satan sends our way. We stand because, as His Temple, we are Holy. Because of our firm foundation, Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins on the cross, we stand Holy before God the Father.

How important is a firm foundation? Just ask any carpenter you know.

Without that solid base, all the beautiful workmanship and fancy trim will collapse when trials and tribulations come. Doors won't close properly and the drywall seams will crack. Or ask an athlete, without a solid physical core, one does not have the endurance to finish the game.

When we hear the Gospel message of today, the turning the other cheek, going the extra mile and loving our enemies, we may feel our foundation shake a little. Let's face it, these verses rub us the wrong way. We do not

like to be taken advantage of. We certainly do not like the idea of letting our enemies, especially the ones who chip away at our foundations, getting away with anything. Can Jesus really mean this? Does Jesus want us to just lay down? Out of all the things it means to be a Christian, these may just be the hardest ones to accept.

But the Word of God is very clear. There is no room to wiggle out and turn these into anything other than what they are. We do turn our cheek, we give up our cloak when someone asks and we go the extra mile. Yes, we are to love our enemies and what's more, we are to pray for them.

We are to do these things because Jesus first did them for us. Born into original sin we are by our nature his enemies. But He took on our beating, He gave us his cloak and He went the extra mile when He carried our sins, and the sins of the entire world, to the cross. He loves us that much. He prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies, even as they were pounding the nails into his flesh. And by dying on the cross, He saved all of mankind from eternal death.

What appeared to some as weakness, what seemed to many to be His ending, or His defeat was not that at all, for He rose up that Easter morning victorious. Death and sin had been conquered. In reality, His death was the ultimate act of defiance. If he would have fought back, jumped of the cross and taken out the Roman soldiers, Satan would have won and we would have no hope of eternal life. Our sins would not have been nailed to that cross with him. Jesus' death was not defeat or weakness at all, it was the ultimate show of strength.

As a church we show our strength by standing firm on our foundation – Jesus Christ. We turn our face and anticipate Satan's fiery attack. By carrying our neighbor's burden the extra mile without complaining, we show that His church is strong and willing to be different from what the outside world expects. By loving and praying for our enemies we recognize that they are simply lost sinners like us. They are as much in need of the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ as any of us. In fact, we need to bring them into the very church they strike out against.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians let's us know that the enemy will certainly come. He will strike out at the Christian Church with fires that threaten to

destroy it. Not just small local congregations, but the entire Christian Church. The fires should be of no surprise to us as Christians – it's what Satan does. But we know that we can withstand these toils, tribulations and tumult. And we know that we can carry the heavy burden those extra miles. We know that we can forgive our enemies.

We know this because we stand firm on our solid foundation. We are firmly anchored in Jesus Christ. It is He, who feeds us and strengthens us with His body and blood. It is He who teaches us with His Word.

Like snowplows and sledgehammers, the attacks come and pile up against our foundation - but as His Holy Temple, as His people, we boldly face them. We turn to meet them because, as God's Temple, as His church, His bride, we are Holy and we stand strong! We stand on His One Foundation. We stand on Jesus Christ. We are God's very own and we are the Church Victorious.

In the Holy name of Jesus,

Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep
your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.