

## What Remains?

Sermon for the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: Matthew 7:24-27



*<sup>24</sup> “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

Disasters always come completely unexpectedly and place us at the precipice of our lives in minutes or even seconds. That hits deep in our souls and calls into question our very existence as human beings. If everything I hold dear in my life is suddenly gone, there is no longer an escape and no future. Then I don't exist anymore. The question about the future is on everyone's mind these days. Do we even have a future? And can a person plan out his life?

The parable that Jesus gives us is a parable about a wise house builder who has good foresight and plans for all possible eventualities. On the days when there was still good weather, he could see that which was not yet there. He could plan for the coming storm and take the appropriate precautions. That's why he built his house with a foundation. That's why he's the wise house builder in our story. A stark contrast to the other one. The other is foolish because didn't plan anything and only thinks about the present day. The parable that Jesus uses is intentionally simple and easy to understand. Every child can understand what went wrong here. And as outside observers, we already know the fate of the foolish builder. As outside observers, one is tempted to intervene. You'd like to jump into the story and warn the one who built on the sand. "Hey, you're doing it all wrong. If you build your house on sand, you'll lose everything! Every child knows that a house needs a firm foundation!" However, we're not allowed to interrupt the course of the story. Instead, we must observe the outcome of the story from the outside as it unavoidably comes to a bitter end. The parable is crystal clear. This parable is about the foundation: the foundation, as we still know today, can mean the difference between success and failure for the house builder.

And that's exactly what Jesus wants to point out to us. It's about the critical and most important thing. It's about life and our future. But what's peculiar about this parable is that the foolish builder is apparently clueless to this important life-changing foundation. Because the foundation lies hidden under the earth and that's why it doesn't affect him. Both houses, both the wise man's house and the foolish man's house, are made from the same material and look exactly alike. Both are of the exact same quality. The difference can only be seen under the earth. And before the storm comes, no difference can be seen at all between the two houses. When the sun shines and life is quickly passing by, both builders are happy and at peace. Only when the storm comes is the most important difference revealed. The one built his house with a strong foundation. The other on sand. One house remains standing, the other

house is destroyed and vanishes. Jesus tells us this parable right after one of His most important speeches. That was the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus had radically challenged people's complacency. He revealed their hidden sins and showed them how they can find the path to God. And then He perceived that many people, even though they were moved by Jesus' words, wanted to stay the same. They had been impressed by Jesus and even said that He was a good person, but they absolutely don't want to change their lives. Everything should stay the same. Jesus wants to shake these people and us awake! He wants to show us how foolish it is to ignore His words. He wants to warn us that we are standing on a false foundation if we only rely on ourselves. Jesus wants to reveal our weakness and our sins which are hidden from all people and wants to show us that our life has no foundation and therefore also has no future.

What does a house that stands on a firm foundation look like? First of all, one must say that they can't recognize any difference. To get back to the parable: Just as the house without a foundation looks exactly like the house with a foundation, so it is with us. Our whole life can look good for other people. On the outside, we can achieve a lot. We can impress people. And yet it can be that we have no foundation! The most important question upon which everything depends is the foundation that is underground and isn't seen by anybody. Jesus' parables as well as the whole Bible point to God Himself as just such a foundation! In Psalm 18:2, the Psalmist sings:

*"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer!"*

God Himself is the rock. God Himself is the foundation of my life! What's interesting is that we think exactly like the foolish builder, that we don't need this God and can get along without Him just fine. And when the sun is shining and life is going well, it really looks as though life functions perfectly without God. It isn't apparent to us that we built on the wrong ground. God who is the foundation of our life must remain invisible. And yet I can't remain foolish and clueless forever on this important question about God: If I would build a house on earth, I know that instructions from YouTube wouldn't be enough to know how to build it. An expert must already be here. And when it's about eternal life, it's the same. When it's about the most important question, which is about eternal life, I certainly can't rely on finding my way on my own. YouTube and Google also aren't sufficient. I can't rely on what this one or that one would maybe say on how I would inherit eternal life. I can rely even less on what my feelings tell me. No, here I must send for the expert of souls. And that is Jesus. When it's about God and building an eternal house, then Jesus is the expert. There is no other who can create the connection between God and humanity besides this Jesus. What remains at the end is the cross of Jesus. What remains at the end are the words: Given for you for the forgiveness of your sins. That is the foundation of our lives.

Jesus wants to reveal this path to God to us and therefore puts the parable under a clear inscription: <sup>24</sup>"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them...is like a wise man." With this inscription, we notice that the parable is crystal clear. If we stand on Jesus, we have a foundation. When we don't, we're lost. The words of Jesus are still hard. Jesus' words are hard because we feel exposed. We quickly notice that we also belong to those who don't listen to Jesus' words. We notice that our life leads to nothing, and we stand in front of a chasm! What must change so that we find this path to Jesus and His words? What must change so that we not only hear the words of Jesus but also do them? In the sermon that Jesus spoke earlier, He constantly emphasized that it's not enough for people to just change their actions, but that people's nature must change. A rotten tree can't produce good fruit and a good tree can't produce rotten fruit. Jesus gives us an unmistakable, clear, and sure offer. We can simply

refrain from building on the sandy ground of our own possibilities. We can build on Jesus because then we have a foundation that is anchored on firm ground and that changes our life so much that no storm or bad weather can get us off track. That's exactly why Jesus came to us because we can't create this firm ground on our own. So, He came and gave His life as a sacrifice for us. Furthermore, He promised us that we can build our whole lives on Him. Whoever is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is saved.

This foundation that Jesus established for me changes everything. As soon as my foundation stands on Jesus, I know that my house is safe. The person who can see the hidden foundation in God is very wise. The one who can recognize the hidden future is also wise. The one who knows what storms await us is wise. Without a strong foundation, we can't possibly withstand the storms. But a foundation in Jesus unites everything that we have with God. This connection with Jesus and this view of God frees us to act. It frees us not only to hear the words of Jesus but also to do them. Amen.