



**Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA**

**Rev. Scott E. Schul**

**7th Sunday after Epiphany: February 24, 2019**

**Sermon Title: "The Rock"**

**Gospel Text: Luke 6:46-49**

Last Sunday, we heard the beginning of Jesus's Sermon on the Plain. As Pastor Hetrick reminded us, there on that level plain Jesus came to the people where they were at, and gave them the hope they desperately needed. It was hope grounded in the blessings he bestowed – blessings for the people who needed them the most: the poor, the hungry, the mourning, the despised, the excluded, and the weeping. These are the people the world often singles out for *scorn* rather than *blessing*. We know that first-hand, because at times we've been the ones on the *outside*, so needful of blessing. And just maybe there have been times when we were the *insiders*, doing the scorning.

And so if Jesus begins the Sermon on the Plain by *upsetting* the normal order of blessing, and then *upends* the world's notions of who is "in" and who is "out" by scandalously and lavishly expanding the boundaries and borders of the Kingdom of God until they cover all of creation, it is not until the very end of the Sermon on the Plain that he reveals how all of this will come to pass. It won't happen on account of a clever *program*, or an elaborate *plan*, but only because a *person*: Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus reveals this through the familiar parable in today's Gospel lesson, in which the person who builds a house on the foundation of a *rock* is the one whose house survives the flood intact. That rock of course is Jesus. He urges us to build not just our *homes* but our *very lives* on him. Out of his perfect love for us, he wants to be *our* solid foundation. He offers *himself* as *our rock*.

But why is this important? Well, notice Jesus doesn't say that building on the rock is important IF a flood should come. The flood IS coming. We *all* experience the flood of suffering, despair, tragedy, loneliness, and grief at one time or another in our lives. We *all* have moments when we feel lost and wonder what our *purpose* is and who *we* really are. Those are *all* moments when we need a rock on which we can safely stand – a rock to which we can cling.

So, what's involved in building that foundation on the rock? Well, Jesus tells us it's more than just knowing his name or his job title. Even the demons know that. He's longing for a *relationship* with us – one that involves commitment, sacrifice, vulnerability, and – more than anything else – *love*. And it's not like the old days when I was a kid, when you'd really like someone but you'd be worried that you'd ruin it if you called too soon. You always wanted the *other* person to call first so you could play it cool. Jesus doesn't play those kinds of games. He's been *calling* you even before you entered this world. He's been *loving* you since you were

nothing more than an idea. And that love, so freely and unconditionally given, is what will equip and enable *you* to love Jesus back.

Loving Jesus really isn't complicated. If you want to build your life on the rock of Jesus, stick to the fundamentals. Come to church regularly so your faith can be formed, strengthened, and renewed. Read the Bible so you can fill your heart with all of the scenes from this eternal love story with Jesus – a love story that includes *you*. And develop your God-given gifts so you can love Jesus back by loving your neighbor. *Those gifts include the things we can do*, like singing, ushering, repairing storm-damaged homes, writing a note to someone who needs a friend, or serving others through an organization like Out of the Cold, Interfaith Human Services, or Centre Volunteers in Medicine. *Our gifts also include the things we possess*. So as you build your life on the rock of Jesus and are blessed by his abundant gifts, consider sharing those gifts so you can participate in the blessing of others. It's really that simple: love Jesus back by loving and serving your neighbors.

All this “rock talk” got me thinking about some memorable rocks I've encountered in my life. For example, I'll never forget a rocky little mountain in Nicaragua that our group from Grace Lutheran hiked during our last medical mission trip a few years ago. It was in a beautiful village called San Raphael del Norte. I sort of got fooled into this hike. Brian and Celeste Newcomb led me to believe we'd be talking a leisurely walk up a well-manicured pathway. “You'll just love the view, Pastor!” What I only discovered after I started though was that this pathway went straight up for a half mile. It was hot, I was tired from working all day at the clinic, and I was convinced that our little hike was going to do me in.

But what kept me going was the name of this pathway: Peña de la Cruz – the rock of the cross. You see, many years before, a local priest arranged for a huge metal cross to be planted at the top of that little mountain. It's at least 15 feet tall and can be seen for miles. And so this became my pilgrimage – to stay on that rock, following the cross, despite how weary I became. As I hope is evident, I didn't die there on that rock; I made it to the top and I'll never forget the view. I could see the town all laid out like a model railroad village. There was the parish church right in the center. And surrounding it were the mountains and all of the coffee plantations. From that height, there on the rock, in the shadow of that massive cross, I could see things with such clarity. It was beautiful.

Planting ourselves on the rock of Jesus carries a similar blessing. In Jesus we're able to see our world with new clarity. Sometimes the climb is *hard*, but it's always *worth it* because *that's* the place where we find peace, beauty, meaning, wholeness, and holiness. And *that's* the place where we experience Christ's love so vividly. Build your life on the rock of Jesus.

I'll tell you about one more memorable rock in my life. This one is in Maine, in a town south of Portland called Cape Elizabeth. I bet some of you've been there. The coastline is rugged and can be very dangerous for ships. And so in 1791 they built a lighthouse called the Portland Head Light. It stands 80 feet tall, and its soaring whitewashed walls and the iconic orange roof of the adjoining keeper's house makes it picture-perfect. They say it's the most photographed lighthouse in the United States. But its purpose is not to be a *show horse* but a *workhorse*. For over two centuries, the light from that lighthouse has illuminated the coastline.

For those seeking landfall, that light has been a beacon of hope, welcome, and hospitality. And for those trying to avoid a shipwreck, that light has revealed the pathway of safety. The reason the Portland Head Light is able to do all that is because it's firmly anchored on a solid rock. When the storms come to the coast of Maine – and believe me, they come on a regular basis – sailors have always been able to trust that the lighthouse and its beacon light will be there.

In a similar way, Jesus has called and equipped us to be *his* lighthouses. By his grace we too are firmly anchored on solid rock. And from that vantage point of safety and security, he invites us to shine his light – the light of Christ – in all that we say and do. From that solid rock we can be a beacon of hope, mercy, welcome, hospitality, and acceptance for all of God's people. And for those who fear their lives are becoming metaphorical shipwrecks, that light of Christ we beam from our station on his solid rock can reveal the pathway of safety, hope, and peace.

Whether or not we realize it, we all anchor ourselves to something in this life. Make sure it's Jesus. As the old hymn says: "On Christ, the solid rock, we stand; all other ground is sinking sand." Amen.