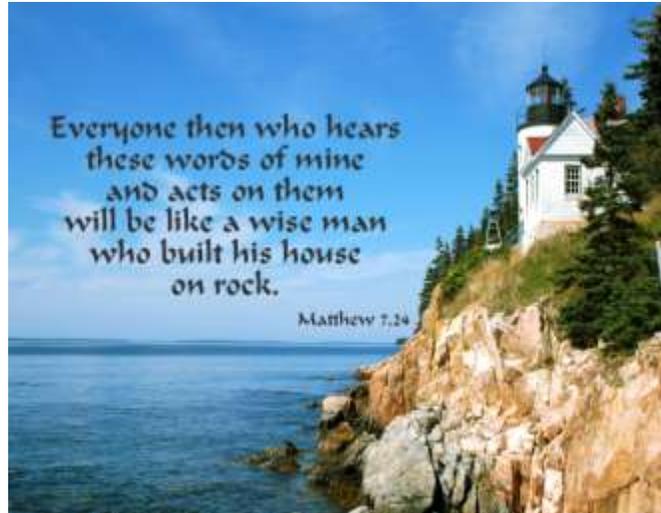


Sermon for the Wedding of KateLyn Riechers and Daniel Kohn

Text: John 7:24-25

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.



Marriage that is Built On a Rock

When there's a succession of hot, humid days such as we know of Missouri, or in wintertime when there are short, dark days of deep cold, I sometimes think it would be good to live elsewhere. Then I reflect on other spots and realize that they too have their problems. Live in the tropics, for example, and there are hurricanes, typhoons, tidal waves. No place is perfect.

The same holds true in married life and in life generally. Not all the days are fair skies, temperatures in the seventies, and a balmy breeze. The storms do come. It's a matter of when, not if. Marriage does not involve relocating yourself to a place free from the threats of storm and flood and damaging wind. Marriage means building the house so strong and sturdy that it can withstand whatever may assault it.

Jesus talks about this in today's gospel. His subject is discipleship and life in general, but what he says applies specifically to that form of discipleship we call Christian marriage.

The storms will come. Not if, but when. Where we have a choice is how we build the house. Shifting sand will not make it. The house we build with our lives must be built upon a rock. That rock foundation, according to Jesus, is available when we hear his words and do them.

Want a solid foundation for marriage, for life? Then listen to the words of Jesus and do them. A secure life is built on this listening. It's not a once-for-all task, something we accomplish and then it's done. This listening is a process. It's something that continues through the years. We can become better listeners over the years, yet there's always something new to hear.

At the wedding there may well be some, this Pastor included, who want to load down the new couple with all sorts of sage advice. Whatever the other drawbacks of this approach, it has this one: general principles cannot possibly cover every circumstance that a couple will encounter in the years ahead. Advice that is general fits uncomfortably with

life that is specific. Yet some of us we may feel the urge to offer our advice at the last minute while the couple are still around to listen.

So here comes today's gospel and what Jesus says there, and for the bride and groom relief is on the way. Here Jesus does not toss out all sorts of maxims, proverbs, and wise observations, hoping they apply to everything we face. He does not try to fit in everything he knows this one last time while he has the chance.

Instead he sounds almost indefinite. You want your house to stand strong? Then listen to my words and do them. Period!

How does Jesus get away with such brevity? When it comes to generalities, it seems his are the most general. Jesus will never leave us. He goes with us as traveling companion throughout life if we will have him. He goes with KateLyn and Daniel as their traveling companion if they will have him.

So the task of today's gospel is not to tell our couple everything they need to know about marriage. The task of today's gospel is not to tell any of us all we need to know about life. This gospel has but one simple task: to get us to listen to Jesus continually and to live in accordance with what we hear. Today's gospel calls us to a hearing, an attentiveness, which is not once-for-all, but continuous and never over.

Yet this hearing of Jesus as he travels with us through life is no easy business. Why? Because other, contrary voices compete for our attention. These other voices can be loud, insistent, and seductive. Without revealing it, they call us to live lives that are glitzy, small, dull, and selfish.

Meanwhile Jesus invites us to be companions with him on the cross, and from that height to look on all the world with love. He invites us to share his death and tomb, that together we may rise with him to a life that cannot be conquered. It's a matter of listening, hearing what he tells us and doing it day by day.

The challenge of continuing to hear Jesus is so great that we need the help that comes only through contact with others engaged in the same effort. I know of only one place where people are explicitly committed to hearing the words of Jesus and doing them. This is the Church in all its forms. Listening cannot be a solo task. We require help if we are to hear and respond. That help is available in the community which calls itself church.

Now today's gospel has a funny turn of phrase where it speaks not simply of hearing the words of Jesus, but of doing them. In English we normally do not speak of doing the words of anyone. But in the worldview that underlies the Bible, word and action do not stand in contrast to each other in the way we understand them to do. Instead, word and action are connected. Word contains action. Action expresses word. There's not so much of a boundary between the two as we might suppose.

So Jesus invites us, day by day, to listen to his words. If we choose to do so, we discover that he addresses the particularities of our lives, of our marriages, not with general advice, with fine proverbs and maxims, but with a truth that is terribly specific, that has our name on it, truth that speaks directly to the heart. Jesus is not a parent back home.

Instead, he meets us in the here and now, is closer to us than our pulse, and reveals the truth we need in the present moment.

And because speech and action are not separate for Jesus, he wants what he says to become real, to burst forth into the world where we live and make a difference among us. He wants us not only to hear his word, but to do it.

Try to understand his dilemma. Once he walked the roads of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem. Now he has no feet but yours and mine. Once his hands healed the sick and blessed the children. Now he has no hands but yours and mine. Once he showed compassion to enemies and friends alike. Now it's up to us to show his compassion.

It's through us that his words will be done if they are done at all. To know these words in the situations of our lives we must cultivate the habit of listening to him. The community of those committed to hear him can help us with our listening. If that listening has not yet begun for any of us, it can begin today.

KateLyn and Daniel, God has blessed you in many ways. God has blessed you with each other and with the friends and family gathered in this place.

Yet you know life is not free from storms and floods and damaging wind. Marriage is not a matter of finding some place where the weather never gets rough. It's a matter of building your house upon a rock foundation.

So let your married life be characterized by a listening to the words of Jesus, by a listening to everything he speaks to you as your traveling companion through the years ahead. Within the community of his disciples cultivate the skill of listening to him. Hear him in your hearts and in the voices of each other and in other voices also. Allow what Jesus says to you to become the action and the adventure in your life.