

SERMON – 25/7/21**“Jesus Guides”**

Matthew 7:24-29

Jesus said, “So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

Last Sunday we began to look at the Bible passages that will be the focus each day at Family Week; we heard Jesus say to His first followers: 'Come with me' and we thought a little about the call of Jesus on our own lives. This morning we are thinking about how Jesus guides us and we read a well-known and, again, very straightforward passage in which Jesus compares someone who wisely builds a house on strong, rocky foundations with someone who foolishly builds their house on shifting sand and He asks us to hear His voice and obey what He says. Now it doesn't take a mastermind to understand the message here – it really stands to reason that if you make a shaky start to something that you are trying to achieve you are going to have trouble, but if you take time to prepare carefully you are more likely to be successful long-term. We *know* what this teaching of Jesus means and we have probably all heard talks and sermons on this passage in the past but the difficulty comes in actually relating it to circumstances we face in everyday life and putting it into practice.

The extreme storm that suddenly came upon people in Western Germany last week brought devastation even in well-built towns and villages, and even wise people were caught unawares and in some cases carried away by the flood waters so what are we to learn from this passage today?

We are all wise enough to see that building a house requires strong foundations and that building on sand is not a good idea but each one of us in life will sometimes have been foolish and all of us will have been taken by surprise by some kind of storm in life that has completely knocked the feet from under us and left us reeling with shock and uncertain about how to move forwards.

As we consider how it is that Jesus guides those who have heard His call to come with Him and have decided to follow Him, who sing as we heard sung a moment ago, 'I want Jesus to walk with me,' I'd like to suggest to you that the key words in our reading this morning are these: “anyone who *hears*

these words of mine,” and the key question we have to ask ourselves is how we are to hear Christ speak, how we are to recognise His voice?

I took myself off for a walk yesterday. I went somewhere I had been before but never really explored but it was all a bit spur of the moment – I didn't plan anything and I didn't follow any marked trails. Now although I wasn't in any real danger of getting lost it might have been a different story if, as in this morning's reading and as in Germany and Belgium and the Netherlands last week, the rain had poured and the rivers overflowed and if the wind had blown hard. I had a nice walk and then found my way back to the car to come home again but I probably didn't have as good a time as I would have if I had prepared properly and not wandered up as many dead-ends as I did. But it made me think about this passage and this theme of Jesus the Guide and it made me wonder about the extent to which, even though I profess to follow Jesus, I am truly asking Him to lead and guide me rather than just wandering along myself, trying this or that way and having to back track when find myself in a blind alley. It made me wonder about the extent to which we as a church are genuinely seeking to build on the rock rather than on the sand because not only are we rather slow to obey what Jesus teaches, we are often not even hearing and listening to these words of His because we do not necessarily recognise how to know when it is He who is speaking.

Jesus says, 'Come with me' and in our enthusiastic faith we say with some of those Jesus encountered during His earthly ministry, 'Lord I will follow you wherever you go' (Luke 9:57) yet we are deaf to the response Christ gave to those people in the Gospels: “Foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Luke 9:58) We sing in times of struggle echoing the spirituality of African slaves whose songs have endured: 'I want Jesus to walk with me' but the way we stride off on our walk through each day without pausing to ask whether Christ might have a different plan for us gives the lie to any notion that we are truly on a *pilgrim* journey. Pilgrims are making for a destination, not wandering aimlessly – if eternal fellowship with God is our longed-for destination, how are we going to find our way there?

As we said last week, the first step is to want to follow Jesus and to decide to follow, so if you are still at *that* stage, wondering whether or not to go Jesus' way, then you really have to address that first. Jesus says, 'Come with me.' And actually, you need to respond to that call every day, every moment. If I

want Jesus to walk with me and if I want to find the destination He is calling me to, then I have to keep going where He is guiding and that means listening for His voice. Jesus says, “The sheep listen to [the shepherd’s] voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out, He goes on ahead of them and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice.” (John 10:3-4) There it is again – we need to recognise that it is Jesus’ voice, because as the Lord Himself says there are other voices that try to attract our attention and distract us from the way.

The crowds who heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount from which our reading this morning was taken knew that His voice was different and that He wasn’t like the teachers they were familiar with. They were *amazed* at the way He taught because He taught with authority. But there have been leaders, orators, revolutionaries, gurus, preachers who have inspired crowds down through the ages – how are we to know that it is Jesus’ voice we hear when our heart is stirred and we are ready to set off in a particular direction? We need to be sure that this is the voice that is laying the strong foundation on which we must build rather than fine-sounding words that prove themselves to be nothing more than a fleeting snatch of music in the air or shifting sands that will be gone as soon as we take the first step.

The message is not startling or glamorous. You have heard it before. The voice of Jesus is heard in the Scriptures, it is echoed and affirmed in the fellowship of Christ’s followers and it is understood in the place of prayer. What is Christ saying to you to guide you along the everlasting way? Open your Bible and read, talk about it with your fellow disciples, ask God about it when you pray, and then listen. For then you will hear the Word and you will know the Rock on which you need to build.

Don’t wait till the storm is upon you. It will be much harder then, it may even be too late because, whether you realise it or not, the foundations will have been set by then, for better or for worse. Begin each day in God’s Word, make time regularly to share your faith journey with others, and pray without ceasing. If you enter into that rhythm of life, that pilgrim way, then you will hear Christ’s voice constantly, unmistakably – you will know without a shadow of a doubt that it is the Shepherd speaking, guiding you to green pastures by still waters, leading you through the darkest valley and setting a feast for you. Then you will be like a wise man who built his house

on rock. The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall because it was built on rock.

Jesus says, 'Come with me.' Keep coming to Him, listen for His voice, hear these words of His and obey Him. And Jesus will be your guide, come hail or shine.