

6 September 2020, 11am

Christ Church New Southgate

& Friern Barnet

Led by Rev Ruth Moriarty

Reading: Matthew 7.24-27

²⁴“So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock.

²⁶“But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!”

Sermon

I have an old-fashioned analogue radio that I love, you tune it with a dial. On day 3 of lockdown I turned the dial away from radio 4 and I discovered a new radio station – stomp, it plays soul music and does not have any news on it. By that day 3 I knew I couldn't cope anymore with hearing about COVID 19, it was like a deluge of news all about the same thing – a total pandemic gripping the world. So I turned the dial just a little to the left and began to relax a little.

Roll on a few months and we are all trying to work out how to live in semi-lockdown, we are wrestling with masks, sanitisers, strange school arrangements, working from home and endless zoom calls.

Recently churches have entered overdrive in trying to work out how we can gather again to worship with risk assessments, distancing, deep cleaning, no communion, no singing, no hugging.

As we look back over lockdown, we see just how much our lives have changed. Some have lost work; others have had to take on new work. Some of us are achingly bored and others frazzled and overloaded and unable to sleep. Some of us have lost loved ones to Covid, our country is mourning the loss of thousands of deaths. The economy has slumped as if we are at war.

It can seem like in every area of our lives we are sinking in sand, blown by the wind, beating us over, and drenched by the rain that simply does not stop.

We have been deluged, totally overtaken by Covid. Our faith may have been knocked too, when all that we have enjoyed as part of a church community is taken away and we simply don't know when it will return.

In Matthew's gospel at the end of the sermon on the mount, Jesus tells a mini parable of a wise and a foolish man, the foolish builds his house on sand. Except he doesn't realise its sand, it looks like firm ground, it looks good for building and the house was so quick to build! But it's built on a wadi – a flood plain. The foolish man's house stands just fine until the rains come.

How's your house? Have you felt battered in the storm of lockdown? Beaten by the wind, and soaked in the rain? For just as in the parable our lives have been deluged by the storm of Covid. For lockdown has exposed the reality of our lives hasn't it? Suddenly we have become aware of the quality of our relationships, we can no longer avoid what has been staring us in the face. We have to engage with a house mate who is difficult, a marriage that is flaky or an empty flat. We might have felt like we were connected to God deeply, but since stopping meeting as a gathered church we have struggled to believe.

To all of us who have heard Jesus' words, his call to all of us to follow him, to care for the needy, to pray, to give, to seek him, to love our enemies, not to worry, not to judge, to follow in his narrow way, to all of us who have heard that sermon on the mount SO many times – Jesus asks us – are you foolish or are you wise? What have we built our lives upon? For now, more than ever our foundations are being tested.

Did you know that in every storm, in every trial, whenever we are caught by a gale – Jesus is the rock. He gives all of us a firm place to stand, a firm place to build on. It is hard work to build your life on Christ, it's harder to give money away than keep it, it's harder to trust god and not worry, it's harder to pray and keep praying, and yet when we do - he offers us total security. He does not say the winds won't come; the rain won't pour. He does not say there will not be a storm but he does give us a safe place – a rock on which to build our lives.

As individuals Jesus is calling each of us to be wise, he is calling us to choose where to build our lives. Don't go for the easy place in the sand, go for the rock. This is the rock of ages – who can always be relied on, grants us safety and peace in times of strife.

As a church, Jesus should be our firm foundation. But you know this rock is not flashy, it isn't where great signs and wonders occur, it is simpler and more demanding than that.

For the crowd perched on that hillside listening to the best sermon ever, Jesus' words remind them of people they know who have lost everything in a flood or a storm.

At a deeper level it also reminds them of the other deluge in the bible, of Noah and the great flood. Here we remember the beautiful and gracious rainbow promise God gives to all of us to care for us. And too we remember the necessity of Noah to obey God and to put into practice all that he had heard from God.

For all of us learning to ride a bike or learning to read or play an instrument we all know that practice is important. How often do we neglect practice in the church? How often do we want theology that is neat and tidy? How often do we want easy answers of what to do in a storm?

The reality of living in lockdown is that there are no easy answers and likewise in the Christian life too. Jesus is calling each and every one of us to put his words into practice.

So, when Jesus says pray, he means pray and keep practicing at praying. I don't think the wise man has a different storm, but I think he tries to put into practice his faith and so builds on the rock of Christ. Faith without action is dead. What are we being called to put into action? What are we being called to practice?

For me every belief we have about God should be seen in action. If we believe God is almighty and powerful, why do we pray little? If we believe God is rich beyond measure, why do we give little of our resources? If we believe God is the judge, why do we delight in judging others?

However, we feel today, deluged by news, yearning for rest and restoration, may we be filled with hope as we learn and continue to learn to build on Christ as our rock. May he sustain us and restore hope in us as we stand on Christ our rock and redeemer. Amen

Prayer

Lord, Lord:
We are sorry for the times we have built on sand.

Lord, Lord:
We repent for the houses we have celebrated that are not built on you.

Lord, Lord:
Remind us again that you are the rock of our lives.

Lord, Lord:
Grant us your wisdom to build our lives upon you, our rock in times of trouble, presence in the storm, a refuge in whom we can trust. Amen