

Sermon 3.6.16

Pastor Josh Ferris

Girl Scout Sunday

Psalm 23 | Galatians 3:25-28 | **Romans 5:1-8** | **Matthew 7:24-29**

By the time Jesus said the words we heard this morning about houses and rocks and floods, he had been speaking for a while. He had just delivered what's known as the *Sermon on the Mount*, where he talked about anger, divorce, revenge, loving your enemies, praying, serving others, money, and worry. It's basically Jesus' guide to honoring God, living a life of faith, and loving others. And after teaching for so long, he finished up by telling the people listening that they could respond to his words in two ways. They could hear them and do nothing, or they could hear them *and act on them*.

And to demonstrate the difference between these two responses, Jesus tells a story. A story of two people who each decided to build a house. The first person built their house on solid rock, while the second person built their house on top of sand. Both houses seemed like a good idea, both of them were warm and secure, sturdy and safe. But when storms came, and brought heavy rains and floods and blowing winds, the house built on the rock stood strong, while the house built on top of sand fell with a crash.

Jesus knew that storms are a part of life. He knew that we all experience times of struggle and trial, loss and frustration, stress and pain, times in life when it feels like the flood waters are rising and the wind is blowing, times when things aren't going well, when things are *tough*, and we feel like we might get swept away.

And in light of this, the question that Jesus asked those who were listening – and the question he asks us – is simple: what is your life built upon? Because only a life built on Jesus will be able to stand the storms of this life.

I was reminded of this recently while I was watching an episode of *Ellen*. Yes, I'm fully aware that you're probably judging me right now because I watch *Ellen*, but I just refuse to be ashamed. A few weeks ago Ellen had a guest on her show named Ronda Rousey. Ronda is an MMA fighter, and is probably one of the toughest people on the entire planet. Over the past two years she's become a household name. She received endorsement deals, she was invited onto talk shows, she even got some jobs as an actress. Everyone was in awe, because Ronda Rousey had *never* lost a fight.

And that changed on November 15<sup>th</sup>, when Ronda stepped into the ring with a woman named Holly Holm to defend her championship belt. Ronda was supposed to win, to *dominate*, but in the second round she went down. She lost, badly.

It was the first time she had ever lost, and she stayed out of the public spotlight for months. Finally a few weeks ago she went on *Ellen*, and when Ronda was asked what it was like to lose, she started crying, and this is what she said:

Honestly, my thought, I was like, in the medical room and I was like down in the corner, sitting in the corner, and I was like, 'What am I anymore if I'm not this?' And I was literally sitting there like thinking about killing myself in that exact second and I'm like, 'I'm nothing. What do I do anymore? No one gives a \*\*\*\* about me anymore without this.'

My heart broke when I heard Ronda say these words. She built her life on the foundation of her own strength, her own power, her own skills, and when she lost, the sand shifted and the foundation moved, and the house came tumbling down.

We're tempted to build our lives around ourselves. The world teaches us to do it. To base our lives on our own power, especially in *this* area, to build our identity around our job, our wealth, or our status in life. We're taught to build the foundation of our lives on our own

intelligence, or beauty, on our own skills and abilities, to base our whole identity on the person we're dating or the things that we *do*. And we're tempted to get our sense of self-esteem and self-worth from these things.

But the truth is that making any of these things the foundation of our lives is like building on sand. Because they will change, and eventually they'll go away. Building your life around your job and money seems like a good idea, until you *don't* get the promotion, until the lay-off comes, until the money runs out, and then the house comes tumbling down. Building the foundation of your life on the person you're dating feels right and good, until the break-up occurs or the relationship ends and then the house comes tumbling down. Building your life on the foundation of your own intelligence or beauty or skills seems like it makes sense, until you find someone who is *more* intelligent, *more* beautiful, and has *better* skills, until you step into the ring with Holly Holm and she beats you, until these things begin to fade with age or time, and when that happens, the house comes tumbling down.

These things do not last, and if we choose to base our life and identity on them, to get our self-esteem and self-worth from them, then when they are swept away, we will be lost, left wondering who we are, wondering if we have any value, wondering if we are loved, wondering if we even matter.

When this happens and the foundation of our life shifts or washes away, it's scary. It hurts. It's awful. But it's also an opportunity. An opportunity to allow something new to be built. At the end of her interview on *Ellen*, Ronda Rousey said, "I did a lot of thinking. And now I'm thinking, 'What's my actual purpose [in life]?" That's the question someone asks when they've felt storms in life, when they want to build on solid ground, with a foundation that will last.

Jesus tells us this morning that a life built on him is a life built on solid rock. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is referred to as a rock. The book of 1 Peter says that Jesus is a *'living stone,'* and that we are invited to build our lives on his foundation. God's Word declares that Jesus is a rock that will never move, and that everyone who believes in him will never be shaken. (1 Peter 2:4-11) A life built on Jesus is built on a rock that can stand the test of every storm, that will stand firm through any wind and rain and trouble. Because while the other things in life may change and fade, Jesus will not. Jesus will never change. Jesus will never abandon us. Jesus will never leave us or forsake us.

We can look to Jesus for confidence in life, knowing we are God's. We can look to Jesus for courage each day, trusting that God is with us. We can look to Jesus for character, finding our purpose and direction in his teachings. And we can look to Jesus and rejoice that our self-worth and self-esteem are not based on *who* we are, but on *whose* we are! We belong to a God who loves us so much that he was willing even to die on a cross for us, to show us love and forgiveness. Even though the grass withers and the flowers fade, even though storms come and our lives change, even though it feels like this world is a strange and dangerous place, Jesus is a steady, constant rock that will never be moved. That is God's promise to you. Now and forever.

And as we hear these words that Jesus used at the end of his most well-known teachings on how to live our faith, how to honor God, and how to love one another, I think they offer us some guidance in the midst of what has become an ugly and, at times, unbelievable election season. We've heard many candidates claim to be Christians, and we've heard a lot of talk about Jesus and God and faith. It's easy to say things that people want to hear, and to claim to be someone or something.

But to be a follower of Jesus means that the way we live each day, our actions and our behaviors, they are a reflection and expression of our inner life of faith. Jesus tells us that his followers aren't those people who just *hear* his words, but those who *act on them*, those who *live them out*. Those people who actually live as Jesus taught during his Sermon the Mount, who seek to be peacemakers, who are humble and merciful, those people who choose reconciliation over anger, who use words to build others up instead of tear them down, those people who love and give and serve instead of hate and take and demand. This is how Jesus calls us to live.

And living this way – knowing God, trusting in him, loving and serving other people – living this way will lead to a better, stronger, richer life than any other. (John 10:10, NIV) The sort of life Jesus invites us to *will* be more meaningful and fulfilling and joyful than any other way we can try to live. It will be built a solid rock, a firm foundation, that will never be moved. Amen.