

Straight from the "Hart"

March 12, 2023



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this service script.

Our Lenten Series is called "Journey of Stones" and is very loosely based on a book by the same title, written by Steven Molin.

Offering/Opening Prayer Gracious God, in faithfully giving of ourselves and these resources we are declaring our belief that all good things have come from your hand, and we are gratefully giving back to honor you and spread your goodness and love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Very loosely ad from Kwasi I. Kena © 2007 Discipleship Resources in W&S Leader's Edition

Call to Worship Come, all who desire to walk in faithfulness with God. Let's open our hearts and minds to him as he places his unwavering love before us again and again. Sit in his presence and soak up his character until we reflect his glory to the world. (Same source as above)



Music The more we bask in God's presence, the more sure is our footing of who he is and what he has done for us – even when surrounded by desperate brokenness. Let's sing of our belief in him.



We Believe

Words and Music: Matthew Hooper, Richie Fike, Travis Ryan

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In this time of desperation when all we know is doubt and fear,
There is only one foundation. We believe, we believe.

In this broken generation, When all is dark, You help us see.
There is only one salvation. We believe, we believe.

(Refrain)

We believe in God, the Father. We believe in Jesus Christ.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, and He's given us new life.
We believe in the Crucifixion. We believe that He conquered death.
We believe in the Resurrection, and He's comin' back again.

We believe.

So, let our faith be more than anthems, greater than the songs we sing.
And in our weakness and temptations, we believe, we believe.

Refrain

Let the lost be found, let the dead be raised. In the here and now let love invade.
Let the church live loud. Our God will say we believe, we believe.
And the gates of hell will not prevail, for the power of God has torn the veil.
Now, we know Your love will never fail. We believe, we believe.

Refrain.

He's comin' back again. He's comin' back again.

Responsive Lenten Confession As sure as our footing may be, we must confess that it is much easier to sing or say a creed about what we believe than to actually live our lives based on that foundation. We only need to look as far as Job who in innocence, suffered; yet his friends were less concerned about their friend's pain than they were to defending the their belief system which included – if life hurts, it always is because you did something sinful to deserve it. Terrible theology. We confess that at times, if we are not careful, we too may fall into the same trap. This responsive reading captures that conversation as Job defends himself against such an attack. Lay Reader Gary will voice Job's words. Join me on the yellow font in voicing the implied words with which Job is contending.

(L - Lay Reader, C – Pastor with Congregation)

L: My misery is heavier than all the sands of the sea.

C: You should not complain.

L: Donkeys bray when they find no grass. Oxen low when they have no food.
People complain when there is no salt in their food. My appetite is swallowed
by sorrow.

C: Do not deny the words of the Holy One.

L: I do not have the strength to hope. I have nothing to live for. I am not strong like stone or bronze. I am utterly powerless to help myself, with no chance of success.

C: We are here to help you in your need.

L: Your “help” is nothing but callous, ungodly accusations. Your friendship is as reliable as a seasonal stream. In the cool, calm times - it overflows its banks with ice and melting snow. But in heated, dry times, its welcome nourishment quickly evaporates. It offers no refreshment, dashes hope, and leaves people to perish.

C: We see your tragedies and it terrifies us.

L: What are you afraid of? That I will ask you for a hand-out or to save me from ruthless people? What have I done wrong that makes you distance our friendship?

C: Honest words are painful.

L: Yes, but *your* judgmental criticisms are empty. You assume guilt and ignore pain. Don't be so unjust. I know right from wrong.

C: Is this not the struggle of all humanity?

L: I have been assigned months of futility. It is like a never-ending workday, yearning for a payday that never comes. Sleepless nights drag on, filled with tossing until dawn. When I go to bed, I think, 'When will it be morning?' And when it is morning, I think, 'When will this day end?'

C: Days fly faster than a weaver's shuttle. Our life is but a breath.

Inspired by Job 6:2-7:7

Theme

Job says we are not made of bronze or stone to stand in the storms of these brief, fast-paced years we have on this earth. We must build, therefore on a good foundation, and we must build wisely based on that foundation, as we hear in this sanitized version of Christopher Walken's and Flora Annie Steel's versions of a classic English Fairy Tale,

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs, and they each decided to build themselves a home. Now the first little piggy was a lazy little piggy, and he built his house from straw. The second little piggy was not too bright either, and he built his house from twigs. But the third little piggy was smart. He was no dunskee, He built his house from bricks! Smart piggy! Oink Oink!

Anyway, in the same village there was a wolf. This big wolf! Bad wolf. Big bad wolf! Also, this wolf, he loved pork. Pork sandwiches, pork pies, pork scratchings,

bacon buddies. If it had pig in it, he loved it. Now wolfie sees the three little houses with the three little pigs in them, and he thinks to himself -- Pork city!

Wolfie goes to house number one. Wolfie knocks on the door, but it is a straw door, so how he knocks on it, I don't know. Who wrote this? But hey, knock knock anyway, right? who wants to argue? In his most polite voice, wolfie says, (bass voice) "Little piggie, little piggie, let me come in."

(Falsetto) "No," says the little pig, who knows a wolf when he sees one. (Falsetto) "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin." So now the pig has a chin, what do I know. (bass) "Let me in" says the wolf, "or I'll huff and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down" (Falsetto) "No," says the pig. "No, no, no."

But wolfie is a wolf of his word, so he huffs and he puffs and he blows that house awaaaay. Exit pig one, [who ran from his house and hid in the house with pig number two].

[Wolfie comes to the home of] pig two. Same story. (bass) "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down" I like this wolf, he's not freezing his "tush" off hunting snow bunnies in Alaska. He just goes to pig's houses and blows on them. [But the two pigs escape because he was greedy and tried to catch both at once. The two piggies managed to get into the brick house and slam the door just before wolfie could catch them.] So woldie stands outside the house of piggy number 3, and they assume the battle positions. (bass) "Let me in." (Falsetto): "No. No." (bass) "I'll huff and I'll puff" (Falsetto) "Go away." (bass) "OK, you axed for it piggy." Wolfie is huffing -- "huff huff" and wolfie is puffing "puff! puff!" Boof Badaboom - nothing. This is a brick house, they do not blow over so easy. * So, wolfie goes away sad, and the three piggies live happily ever after.

* Main text of story is adapted from Christopher's Walken's reading on the TV show SNL. Words in [] were paraphrased edits inserted into the story coming from a version by Flora Annie Steel (1922) printed on americanliteratrue.com. "Wolfie goes away sad" is a less violent ending different than the sources used.

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Paul tells us that

Each one will be rewarded based on their own work... People build on this foundation with gold, silver, gemstones, wood, grass, or straw. The quality of each person's work will be revealed in time as it is tested by fire. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:8b,12-14 (NIV, VOICE, WE)

Jesus reminds us that that even tangible and seemingly permanent things are not strong enough. When walking away from the massive Temple in Jerusalem, the disciples came up to him to point out how magnificent its buildings were.

Jesus replied, “Look around you. Do you see all these buildings? Truly I tell you, Not one stone will be left on top of another. Not one stone will be left standing.”

Matthew 24:(1)-2 (NIV, VOICE, WE)

We need something more permanent and with more heart than nest eggs, stone buildings, museums, and memorials – Paul says that when we build our Christian faith, there is only one true option, for

“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid. Jesus Christ himself is the foundation.”

1 Corinthians 3:11 (NIV, VOICE, WE)

Music This song is based on an old, popular hymn but is musically a bit different, and is interspersed with a reminder that it is Christ alone that is the Cornerstone – we’ve been talking about Jesus as the foundation, the song uses the word cornerstone, which, especially in ancient days, was the most important stone in the foundation – you get it wrong, and the building is *all* wrong – get it right, and you’ve got a good building. It is just a slightly different image, but the meaning is the same. Jesus Christ and his teachings are upon whom we build our lives, and it is through him that frail people like Job and ourselves can find strength in the Savior’s love to withstand any storm, for he is the Lord of all....

Cornerstone

Words and Music: Edward Mote, Reuben Morgan, Jonas Myrin, Eric Liljero
© 2012 Hillsong Music Publishing

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean in Jesus’ name.

Refrain

Christ alone, cornerstone; weak made strong in the Savior’s love.
Through the storm he is Lord, Lord of all.

When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil,
my anchor holds within the veil.

Refrain

He is Lord, Lord of all.

Refrain

When he shall come with trumpet sound Oh, may I then in him be found;
dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless stand before the throne.

Refrain 2 x (song softly the first time)

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

The prophets warn us that we are foolish to construct anything of our own doing to save and sustain us – they are worse than poor substitutes for God. And while we may not have trouble with wood or gold, we may think about what priorities we are tempted to substitute for God and see if they make any better sense than these words from the prophets.



Do you see the irony? He sits around, warming himself and roasting dinner with wood from the same tree from which he crafted a god... No one stops to think, I used half the wood for a fire, baking bread and meat over its hot coals. Shall I use the rest of it to make a repulsive god, to bow down to this leftover block of wood, pray to it and saying, “Save me, you are my god!”

What value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation, a god that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to a block of wood, “Wake up! Come to life!” or to lifeless stone or metal, “Arise!” Can it give guidance? It may be covered with gold and silver, but there is no breath in it. But the Eternal Lord is in his temple. Let all the earth keep silent in his presence...

Isaiah 44:19, 17b,18 Habakkuk 2:18-20 (NIV, VOICE)

Music I saw a meme the other day. I couldn’t re-find it, but part of it said this: when we pray, God listens. When we are silent, God speaks. Ecclesiastes says there is a time to speak up, and there is a time to be quiet. Sometimes, like Job’s friends, we are so quick to give the answers we know that we don’t get a chance to consider what is the most important reality to deal with in that situation, and we’d be in a better place if we simply stopped and listened to God’s presence speaking to us. Job’s friends did really well the first seven days when they didn’t open their mouths – and then – oh well... Let’s sing Word of God Speak as we prepare for prayer.

Word of God Speak

Words: Peter Kipley, Bart Mallard Music: arr. by David Shipps
© 2002 Simpleville Music

I'm finding myself at a loss for words, and the funny thing is, it's okay.
The last thing I need is to be heard, but to hear – what you would say.

Refrain

Word of God, speak; would you pour down like rain,
washing my eyes to see your majesty?
To be still and know that You're in this place;
please let me stay and rest in your holiness.

Word of God speak.

I'm finding myself in the midst of you, beyond the music, beyond the noise.
All that I need is to be with you, and in the quiet, hear your voice.

Refrain 2 x

Pastor's Prayer God of infinite goodness, throughout the ages you have persevered in claiming and reclaiming your people. We seek you, for we are in deep need of your refreshing power. We see all around us your grace and your glory. You have been and are our help — in the shadow of your wings we sing for joy and cling to you for you uphold us. We will bless you as long as we live. We will never fail to call on your name, or to stop and hear your voice, to understand, and do what you would have us do as most important in every circumstance of our life. Continue to surround us with those who help us on our journey toward you. Form in us the space and time to allow you to progress us on this unending road of growth toward you.

From the depths of your faithful love, you blessed us with your Son Jesus to show us how to humbly serve others. Renew us, that we may renew others. In these moments, we lift the celebrations and needs, not only for ourselves, but for those around us and throughout the world. **Praises and Petitions** We pray for * those who are traveling, * for Jeanette Fuller's sister Debbie Ellis who has cancer -- and for all those unnamed among us-- and beyond us -- who are recovering from illness or injury or facing tests or loss or other types of challenges or setbacks in their lives, for these and others on our hearts and minds, we lift our prayers. Or we simply listen in this moment of silence [Pause] Now Lord, continue to shape us and transform us by your grace, that we may grow in wisdom and in confidence, never faltering until we have done all that you desire to make your peace a reality, living as your Son taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Music If we live our lives by building on the Cornerstone, the foundation of Jesus Christ, even though we may not get everything perfectly right, we need not doubt, nor need we be shaken by circumstances because we live in the safe place of God's presence

My Hope is in You

Words and Music: April Geesbreght & Ed Cash

© 2010 Sony/ATV Cross Keys Pub.

I meet with You, and my soul sings out as Your Word throw doubt far away.
I sing to you, and my heart cries, "Holy! Hallelujah! Father, You're near."

Refrain

My hope is in You, Lord, all the day long. I won't be shaken by drought or storm.
A peace that passes understanding is my song, and I sing:
My hope is in You, Lord.

I wait for You, and my soul finds rest. In my selfishness, You show me grace.
I worship You, and my heart cries, "Glory! Hallelujah! Father, You're here."

Refrain

I will wait on You. You are my refuge. (4x)

My hope is in You, Lord, all the day long. I won't be shaken by drought or storm.
Refrain

My hope is in You, Lord. (2x)

Intro to and Bible Reading 3

How can we be sure of our hope, our refuge, our indescribable peace that throws doubt away? Jesus explains that if we, who are broken and live in a broken world, know how to give what is right and good to those we love, then how much more will our perfect heavenly father in his perfect love, be able to do what is best for us?

Think of it this way: If your son asks for bread, will you give him a stone? Of course not – you would give him a loaf of bread. If your son asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? No, you would give him the best fish you could find. So if you, who are sinful, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven, who is perfect., give good gifts to his children who ask him! So in everything, in every circumstance, do to others what you want them to do to you. This sums what the law and the writings of the prophets, our Scriptures, teach.

Matthew 7:9-12, (NIV, VOICE, WE)

And those who build their lives on this “golden rule” will endure doubt or drought or storm. We’ve already heard the fairy tale about the pigs who built with various levels of expertise – now hear Jesus’ take on what happens to those who build their house, their life, on shaky, shifting strategies versus true and changeless principles of love.

Everyone who is listening to these words of mine and does not put them into practice will be like a foolish man who has no sense. He builds his house on the sand. When a storm comes to his house, the rain falls hard and the waters rise high, the winds blow and beat against that house, and it will collapse with a great crash.

But everyone who is listening to these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who has good sense. He builds his house on a rock. When storms hit, the rain pounds down and the waters rise, levies break and the winds blow and beat against that house, but the house did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

Matthew 7:26-27, 24-25 (NIV, VOICE, WE)

Special Music [ending with something like] We build our lives on the solid words of Jesus teaching – words that bring to our life fullness and beauty. Hear Donna and Kathy play Wonderful Words of Life... **Wonderful Words of Life**

Sermon Substitute Stone: Mistaken Foundations

It may well have been in seeking the freedom to live out those wonderful words of life that a shipload of travelers took great risks, invested all they had and left everything else behind -- all for the chance of realizing a dream across a watery wilderness. They landed on the northeast coast of America over 300 years ago. The first year they established a town site. The next year they elected a town government. The third year the town government planned to build a road 5 miles westward into the forest. The town revolted. In three years, the people’s vision had shrunk from giving up every resource they had for a 3,000 mile journey into the unknown -- to giving nothing for a five mile trek of potential expansion beyond their own borders.

Spiritual walks can get like that. With a clear vision of what Christ can do, no ocean of difficulty is too great. But somewhere along the journey we get to liking a particularly convenient rest stop and our vision narrows, our journey slows and sometimes even stops. We stop reaching beyond our own limited human

boundaries. We play it safe with patterns of familiarity, whether it is right or not, whether it works or not.

It is not that we intentionally substitute solid visions of God's will for a life built on shifting shadows or empty vapors. Jesus asks rhetorical questions to show that (generally speaking, the normal understanding is that) even sinful parents know how to give their children the necessities of life and more. It is simply that we sometimes we get confused over what is permanent and what is temporary, between what is important and what is trivial, what is needful and what is not. An old nursery rhyme reminds us how easy it is to lose the desired focus.

Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?
 I've been to London to visit the Queen.
 Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you do there?
 I frightened a mouse under the chair.

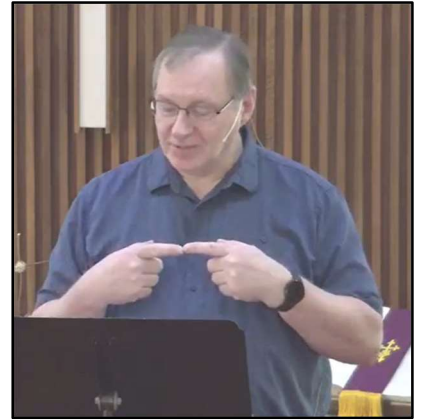
We settle for petty participation, chasing trivial but tempting distractions; making mountains out of molehills, and losing sight of the mountain altogether -- we chase mice instead of spending time with the heavenly Kingdom we came to seek, to revive the vision of what life under God means, of delving into an ever-deepening our relationship with God, to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus.

We begin doing something because it is right and God-driven. It becomes popular as people respond to it, and over time we cease to ask if it is right or wrong or God-driven; and we ask what will make this more popular, and the foundation has shifted from God pleasing to self or people pleasing.

To apply Isaiah and Habakkuk's words – it is like constructing some thing, some program, some task. We bring it into being, and then instead of it becoming a tool to accomplish that higher purpose, it itself becomes the higher purpose. We begin to trust in our creation -- we let it speak to us the direction of our life, shaping our values; focusing our priorities, constructing our center. The prophet says "Beware, (woe)" to those who have lost the King to chase a rat. How do we know if that has happened? Ask ourselves honestly -- Do I own my toys, or do my toys own me? Am I doing what is helpful, what props up the world, or only what gives me props? Are the things I have constructed in my life now shaping me differently than I have purposed them for? Have I become imprisoned to what I have built?

As an example -- Herbert Jackson told how as a new missionary he was assigned a car that would not start without a push. After pondering the problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to take some children

out of class, and had them push his car off. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or keep the car running. He used this ingenious plan for two years. Then ill health forced the Jackson family to leave. A new missionary came to replace him. Jackson told of the car and proudly began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started, while the new missionary opened the hood and looked. Before the explanation was complete the new missionary said “Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only problem is this loose cable. He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch and to Jackson’s astonishment, the engine roared to life. Two years of endless trouble had become routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting the power to work... This is a story about how we need to keep a strong connection with God. But for our purposes today, let’s add another thought from it. What if Jackson had been remaining there as a missionary and he’d found this out. It’d have been interesting to see if he would have tried to hang on to his old, elaborate, and cherished method of choice that had suddenly become obsolete. Probably a no brainer in that case – but how often do we hang on to things or continue practices in our life that have run their course and are now obsolete, and now they simply consume our time and energy-- but that fact that they are obsolete has eluded us because it is what we are so familiar with we can’t imagine not doing it anymore.



We’ve heard over the last few weeks how Jesus longed for Jerusalem to come into relationship with his heavenly Father, but the people were too busy building God’s institution into *their own* image to notice, never realizing that what they were doing, at least how they were doing it, was obsolete --- and unhelpful --- and actually in the way.

The disciples were looking at the marvelous temple -- what great stones, what marvelous craftsmanship, what solid permanence -- a living legacy to the faith! Jesus replies that it will be in ruins in no time. What seems so beautiful, and grand, and proper, and solid, and permanent -- it is none of it.

The poet Shelley pointed out to us the way of all things temporary. This is a poem that was written when ruins were discovered, and there was a contest to write about it and several poems were became popular. This was one of the most popular ones.

"OZYMANDIAS"

by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

I met a traveler from an antique land,
 Who said – “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

People tend to think lifeless brick and mortar will last forever, while relationships are tenuous and fleeting. And is some kind of senses that is true, but that causes us to invest in things instead of people. We want to build monuments. But Jesus reminds us that buildings and things -- over time, is what is temporary and perishing, while it is love in relationships that will never fail, and from which we can never be separated. It is in the strength of that connection, that relationship with God, that life is lived or not lived.

Ironically, Jesus uses a construction metaphor to illustrate what that means – houses built on rock or sand, lives built on the rock of his teachings, or on the stony sands of something else. The process of building is the process of doing what he taught and modeled for us. This is more than a legalistic obedience to the Law of Moses, or the streamlined commands of Christ -- it is about maintaining a relationship with God through Jesus.

And that relationship flows not only to and from God, but also to and from each other. For on the heels of the reassurance that your heavenly father gives good things to you because he is your Father and you are his children, “Therefore”, Jesus says. And he summarizes what that response to God’s gracious gifting looks like -- by enhancing what we now call the Golden Rule. “Do to others --” God is so good to you gifting you these things, therefore, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

I say he *enhanced* it because ancient wisdom older than Jesus had previous versions which said “Do not do anything to anyone you would not want them to do to you.” It was a restraint against negative actions. If you wouldn’t want someone to do something bad to you, then don’t do that bad thing to them either. I think we even need to learn that one. But Jesus pushes proactive and positive. If you would *want* it done to/for you, then you do that for others. The rule is to not only avoid doing wrong acts, but to take initiative in doing the right loving acts.

The Golden Rule is often twisted today. Even back in Jr High I read T-shirts people wore – the essence of what they said was: “Since others are going to do it to me, I am going to do it to them first.” It becomes a justification for a pre-emptive strike -- distorting the golden rule to justify all sorts of mean-spirited things. But the rule is not about what you anticipate or expect another wants to do to you, but what you would want them to do to you.

**The Golden Rule is:
Not what you expect**

I have also heard it quoted a bargaining tool: “If I do this for them, then they *have* to do this for me.” The rule becomes a mutual back scratcher principle, or even manipulating others, “If I do this then they have go to do that.” But the rule is not about doing something so you can get something. It is not about what we want from others, but about what we do for others.

Not a bargaining chip

In a positive sense, there may be some general practical wisdom in this: “If you want a friend, be friendly. If you want a good spouse, become a good spouse. If you want honesty from others, be honest with them. But the truth of our fallen world is that those actions do not always create the desired reaction, and sometimes they may even take advantage of those positive qualities. You get the opposite of what we were hoping for. So it is not a promise either.

Not a promise

The golden rule is not about reacting to anticipated responses, or manipulating the responses, or guaranteeing a desired response.

**Not about what they give us,
but about what we offer others**

Sometimes people apply the rule to others, but not to themselves in what I call one-way-street-ism. They apply the rule on everyone else – enforcing what they are supposed to do for them -- while not feeling any obligation to do the same. For example, “I don’t want to be harassed” so I enforce the rule on others by tell them, “If you don’t want to be harassed, don’t harass me.” But then I feel fine with going

out and harassing everyone else. The rule doesn't work that way. It has to go both ways.

In fact, this rule of conduct is less about how we are *being* treated, but how we *treat* others -- regardless of how they treat us. We are called to go beyond our "natural impulses", beyond our human limitations, to do for others what will bring their shalom, their wholeness, their peace, their completeness; because that is what we would want others to bring to us as well (whether we actually receive it from them or not).

The *foundation* of our chosen action is not built on what we expect or hope from others -- but on the basis of God's Built on God's grace grace, on what the Father has already gifted to us in giving his Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ endured and died for us because that is what he would want us to do for him. Because the heavenly Father gifts us with so much, he would hope that *in everything*, we would gift others with the same types of things we would hope that they would gift us if the roles were reversed. (If I were in their shoes, and they in mine, than what would I want?) So I think of the third pig -- and his graciousness in that story. He didn't complain that the straw builders or stick builders came running to his hosue -- he could have easily said, "You're fault! It's your fault to built with such inferior materials. It is your fault you were so stupid about building how you did or if you couldn't afford to do it, then that is your fault too -- you should have worked harder to get more money so you could have built with better material, and on and on he could have gone... instead he just opened the doors and let them in, because he would want someone to welcome him and offer help and refuge if he found himself in that situation -- for whatever the reason might be. The third pig not only welcomed them, but in the more gruesome original story, he actually, happily, set a feast for them.

Meditation – Procession of Stones

If you don't have your stone in your hand, please take it up now. Bow your heads. As always, the questions are in the bulletin and will be scrolled on the TV following the blessing, but for now, with eyes closed simply listen and meditate on your *own* life. Today we hold a substitute stone.

We may think they are solid and as the massive as temple stones: it may represent a nest egg, or it may not be material at all, it may be a philosophy, a legacy, a popularity, a powerful influence -- we may even started out as a good thing in relationship with God or others -- but it is no longer grounded in that trust

and commitment, and obedience to the Cornerstone. Therefore, here is the first question:

- 1) Are there any foundations (any values and priorities in your life) that you thought were solid rock that turned out to be shifting strategies (what the Bible and the fairy tale called sand, twigs, wood, straw, even stone, precious metals, and gemstone?) Might I still be building some areas of my life on something that is no stable? Have I been distracted off course by temptations of a trivial pursuit (like mice under the chair) instead of what is really important?
- 2) Do I use people to build up my system of life – or does my belief system of life build up people?
- 3) Do I take seriously the accurate principle of the Golden Rule? (Matthew 7:12) Are there any areas in my life I could live out this better?

Music The instruments play in a moment. Think about these questions or anything related that may have popped into your head during the service that God may be speaking to you about. As you hold the substitute stone, things that may have taken the place of the teachings of Christ, the Cornerstone, the Foundation, the solid Rock, our fortress and refuge. If nothing comes to mind in these brief moments, then allow the stone to represent anything that is weighing you down, or another who is weighed down and it is heavy on your heart. We'll meditate as the instruments play through the first verse, and when that verse comes to completion we will stand as quietly as possible and begin singing the first verse, and as we do we will place our substitute stone at the foot of this cross in front of me indicating our desire for Jesus to be first and foundational in our lives, not only in voice and mind, but in our living. And if walking is challenging, feel free to ask another to carry your burden stone forward for you. We are called to do this for each other. After you have placed your stone, return to your seat and remain standing as we finish singing of the song. Prayerfully meditate as we hear How Firm a Foundation the first time through.

How Firm a Foundation

Words: 'K' in Rippon's A Selection of Hymns, 1787

Music: Early USA melody; harm. from Tabor, 1866

1. "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2. "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

5. "The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.



Blessing Now as you go, remember that *"Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well."* 1 Peter 4:10 (CEV) to the glory of the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ our Cornerstone. Amen.

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