

Little House . . . Big House

November 10, 2002

Background Study

In these studies, we've been considering our responsibilities as trustees of God's house. In the past three weeks, we saw how thinking of ourselves as trustees of God's creation is more useful than trying to figure out what it means to be a steward. We also looked at the importance of being grateful receivers of all God's gifts and we considered what it means to be wise trustees of God's house. In recent weeks, the children of St. Andrew have been learning about God's House and what it means to them to move from a little house to a big house - and so shall we!

A Key Scripture Passage - Matthew 7:24-29 (NRSV)

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

²⁸Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

A Brief History of God's House

Though we can speak of God's house as being all of creation or the household of God's people, this week we mean a physical structure that is set aside for God and his people. More than 3200 years ago, after redeeming the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt, God told Moses, “Have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell with them” (Exodus 25:8). Because the Hebrews were nomadic at this time, this tabernacle was a large tent. God gave Moses detailed instructions for its construction and every detail of the tabernacle was meant to teach something about God's holiness. For example, the materials used to build the tabernacle increased in beauty and expense as one got closer to the Holy of Holies, a small curtained area inside the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant. Only the priests of Israel could enter the tabernacle and only the High Priest of Israel could enter the Holy of Holies and, then, only on one day of the year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The tabernacle was a place set apart for God. The Israelites understood it to be God's dwelling place with them.

Several hundred years later, after the Israelites had conquered Jerusalem, God asked King David, “Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle” (1 Samuel 7:5-6). God's permanent home, the temple, would actually be built by David's son, Solomon. This temple, having the same general layout as the tabernacle, would stand for more than 400 years, until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587BC. After returning from the exile in Babylon, the Jews rebuilt the temple. This second temple had its ups and downs but stood until about 70AD when it was destroyed by the Romans. A third temple has never been built. Today, the “wailing wall” in Jerusalem is part of the temple wall that stood in Jesus' day.

Like the tabernacle before it, the temple was not a place of public worship, it was God's home. The general populace had access only to the temple courtyards. Thus, Jews would often gather in people's homes during festivals and to read the Hebrew Bible. By Jesus' day, Jews had spread throughout the Mediterranean and many Jews could live their whole lives without ever making it to the temple. Thus, they had begun to meet in gathering places, or synagogues¹, where they would read and study scripture. Because all the first Christians were Jewish, it shouldn't surprise us that they too met in people's homes. For example, when Paul wrote a letter to the churches in Corinth, Greece, twenty or so years after Jesus' resurrection, there were probably no more than 200 Christians in Corinth, who met in four or five different homes, since no home could host more than 50 or so. As time passed and the Christian church grew, communities of believers began to use common buildings where they would gather for worship, fellowship, and service. At St. Andrew, we will soon celebrate the completion of a glorious building for these very purposes.

Building on a Solid Foundation

The key scripture passage for this week is from the closing section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus teaches his disciples the Golden Rule, in many ways a summary of Jesus' ethical teachings. After that verse, Jesus begins to close his sermon with words of warning, drawing stark contrasts between those who take his teachings seriously and those who do not. Those who hear and obey walk through the narrow gate (v.13-14). They avoid false prophets (v. 15-20). They don't just proclaim their faith in Jesus, they actually do God's will (v. 21-23). Finally, Jesus tells the story of a man who built a home lacking a solid foundation. Notice that in the parable, it isn't poor construction techniques that create the man's troubles; it is his choice of site. Rather than building on solid, dry ground, he builds on the sandy flood plain of a seasonal river, where rising waters would wash away what he built. Sometimes, Jesus' parables can seem rather mysterious and difficult to grasp; this parable is neither. Jesus reminds us ~ commands us ~ that we are to build our homes, our lives, and our churches on him and on his word. The person who builds on rock is the one who hears Jesus' words and "acts on them." The foolish person, the one who builds on sand, hears Jesus' but "does not act on them." They both hear, but only one obeys. Here, Jesus teaches his disciples that our obedience, our willingness to *do* not just *say*, is the proper foundation for a right relationship with God and with one another.

Our Immediate Challenge

We at St. Andrew are about to move into a new sanctuary, music, and education building, more than doubling the size of our church home. These beautiful buildings will enable us to grow, numerically and spiritually, as we seek to obey Jesus and the commission he gave us all ~ to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The financial strain on our church budget in the coming year will be evident, for the current membership will be supporting this much larger new home. But this is how churches grow. This is what it means to be a wise trustee of God's house; putting to work for God the resources he has entrusted to us. Of all the peoples in all the nations of this world, the fact is that God has richly blessed us, even in these difficult economic times. As cheerful receivers of God's gifts, we in turn will give generously at this extraordinary time in the life of St. Andrew. We have been given an opportunity to build a foundation that will stand for many years - in our facilities, and even more importantly, in our discipleship. Praise God!!

¹ *Synagogue* is a Greek word meaning "gathering place or "assembly of people."

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Exodus 25 Instructions for the building of the Ark and the tabernacle</p>	<p>Day 2 2 Samuel 7 God makes a covenant with David. God will have a house; David will have an eternal dynasty.</p>
<p>Day 3 1 Kings 6 Solomon begins construction of the temple</p>	<p>Day 4 1 Cor 3 Paul is a master builder on the foundation of Christ. We are God's holy temple and are to be wise builders ourselves.</p>
<p>Day 5 Revelation 3:14-22 A message for the rich, but lukewarm, church in Laodicea</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

