

FIXER UPPER: RENOVATION OF THE HEART Sermon Series
Renovating Our Will (Luke 6:43-49 NRSV)
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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/renovating-our-will

In October 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall at the Florida Panhandle with winds as strong as 160 mph – just one of four Category 5 hurricanes on record to have hit the U.S. mainland. Michael made landfall near Mexico Beach and Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, and devastated communities there resulting in 16 deaths and \$25 billion in damage. Our Refuge youth group traveled there in July 2019 to help with the cleanup efforts still going on nearly nine months after Michael thundered ashore.

In Mexico Beach, about 30 minutes south of where we worked that summer, more than three-quarters of the homes were flattened by winds. It looked like a war zone. But one home garnered a lot of attention as it survived Hurricane Michael almost unscathed – the Sand Palace. Russell King and his nephew built their family's dream home in 2017 with the intention of "building one for the big one." They just didn't realize the big one would be less than a year later.

The Sand Palace was built on 40-foot pilings with a first-floor height 15 feet above the ground, which significantly reduced the potential for substantial flood damage resulting from Michael's surging waters. The house was fashioned from poured concrete, reinforced by steel cables and rebar, with additional concrete bolstering the corners of the house. The space under the roof was minimized so that wind could not sneak underneath and lift it off. And although codes for the panhandle required new builds to withstand 150 mile-an-hour winds, Sand Palace was built to withstand 250. The nephew stated, "... we wanted to build a house that would survive for generations." ⁱ While the cost of this construction was significant, the money they saved from the destruction that devastated many of their neighbors has made the investment worthwhile.

While most of us have not had to weather a hurricane, many of us are familiar with weathering the storms of life. We know what it feels like to be battered by winds or find ourselves ankle deep in a quickly rising storm surge. We've found ourselves huddled up and afraid when it feels like the safe walls of our lives are going to fall down under the strain of it all. Health diagnoses, tough work situations, broken relationships, disappointments and unfulfilled dreams. And, like Hurricane Michael, we may have little warning about these storms and their devastating power until we're in the middle of "the big one". But what if, like the owners of the Sand Palace, before the storms are ever even formed over warm ocean waters, we asked this question - "How can God renovate us now, so we are built to last?" How can God reframe our lives now so that we can weather the strongest storms?

To see what God has to say about this question, let's look at our text today in Luke 6:43-49 from *the Message* paraphrase. Jesus has gathered his disciples and followers on a hillside, teaching them about what it means to be blessed and what it means to be true followers or disciples of Christ. Let's hear the words Jesus spoke beginning in Luke 6:43.

*Vv.43-45 You don't get wormy apples off a healthy tree, nor good apples off a diseased tree. The health of the apple tells the health of the tree. You must begin with your own life-giving lives. **It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts.** Your true being brims over into true words and deeds.*

Jesus is talking to the disciples about their will, their heart – their true being. Think of the will or heart as the executive center of a human life. It is the place from which we initiate and create, where we choose and make decisions about what we will or will not think or do. The heart, as the Bible speaks of it, is not our feelings, but our power to choose a course of action. As followers of Christ, the function of the will is to organize our lives as a whole around God, and, out of our loving attachment to God, to use our will to change our thoughts and feelings in order that we might become the kind of person God wants us to be. The change God does in our heart brims over into our thoughts and our actions. Reading on in verse 46.

*vv.46-47 Why are you so polite with me, always saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'That's right, sir,' but never doing a thing I tell you? These words I speak to you are not mere additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. **They are foundation words, words to build a life on.***

A couple of weeks ago when we began this series, we talked about the temptation to just roll on another layer of paint over the cracks in our lives and to call it a good renovation. But the cracks sometimes alert us to foundation issues that need to be addressed. Jesus warns that claiming Christ as Lord of our lives but not really obeying him is like being a foolish builder who neglects the importance of building on a good foundation. If we want a true renovation of our hearts, one that can withstand the storms of life, it must be built on a foundation of loving Christ and obeying Christ.

Theologian Fred Craddock wrote that "... this confession [of Jesus as Lord], no matter how exuberant, when unaccompanied by obedience will not hold one's life when the storms hit. It is in the storms, and the faithful seem to face more of them than anyone else, that the difference between interested listeners and obedient disciples will be evident."ⁱⁱ

Let's continue with verses 48-49.

*v.48-49 If you work the words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who dug deep and laid the foundation of his house on bedrock. When the river burst its banks and crashed against the house, nothing could shake it; **it was built to last**. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a dumb carpenter who built a house but skipped the foundation. When the swollen river came crashing in, it collapsed like a house of cards. It was a total loss.*

Ouch. Translator Eugene Peterson is hitting a little close to home with this one. We can come to Bible Study each week or even multiple times a week or preach every other Sunday, but if we are not really applying or obeying God's instructions in our daily life, we are like a foolish and unwise carpenter building a faith that will collapse when the storms rage in life. Notice that Jesus isn't saying this out of a sense of shame or judgment or retaliation for not obeying him. The collapse of our life isn't a punishment by Christ for a lack of obedience; it is the result of not living grounded in the One who loves us and wants to save us from collapse. Storms are a part of life. Jesus knows this and, out of love for us, wants to prepare us for the storms so we can be built to last – like the Sand Palace.

So, how does Jesus prepare us, so we are built to last? Well, that is the invitation of this entire series – to learn how to invite God to renovate every area of our lives and to participate with God in this renovation. As we learn to abide with Christ, we come alive with the kind of life we can build on, the kind of life that lasts despite the storms, the kind of life God forms in us through God's Spirit and our willing and humble effort.

When the Sand Palace owners designed their beach home, they researched how the most powerful hurricanes damaged homes so that they could avoid those in their design. They knew the importance of the pilings going deep into the ground to anchor the home, creating the strongest foundation possible. They knew building codes required a structural design to withstand 150 mile an hour winds, but they prepared for 250 winds. They removed unnecessary overhangs that might look attractive but would compromise the structure of the home. They planned and prepared well before the big one ever came so that their home would stand strong after the winds died down.

Jesus says if you will let my words be the foundation on which you build your life, when the storms come, not if, but when they come, you will be built to last. If we abide in Christ, it will be like building a life on 40-foot pilings deep into the ground. If we listen to what Christ says and obey him, even in the smallest matters, it will be like removing the unnecessary overhangs that might not seem like a big deal but can compromise our lives. If we remain in Christ and Christ in us, then we will be prepared before the big one ever comes, and we will find ourselves standing strong after the winds die down.

Because I know my will, I won't speak for yours, but I know mine - to build this kind of life on my own feels the same as if someone gave me the blueprints for Sand Palace and told me to build it. Even though I really, really want that amazing beach house, I cannot build that on my own. The invitation to be formed in the likeness of Christ is something I really want, but I cannot build it on my own – neither through will nor through effort. And so, it is tempting to just give up before I even get started. What our experiences teach us is that when we aim to will ourselves into acting like Jesus said we should, we fail. That gritted-teeth method of forcing ourselves into right behavior is what Jesus called “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” or legalism.

We can't make ourselves live out the kingdom life, but we can decide that we want to and show up ready to do some work. We can trust and abide in Jesus. And trusting in him means planning to obey his teachings. In the words of Dallas Willard, “you can no more trust Jesus and not intend to obey him than you could trust your doctor and your auto mechanic and not intend to follow their advice.” Moreover, “People who do not intend to be inwardly transformed, so that obedience to Christ “comes naturally,” will not be.”

Friends, if we do intend for Christ to renovate every area of our lives, for Christ to build a faith in us that will weather any storm, we can be confident that it will happen. Jesus promised in our text today that the words he speaks to us are foundation words, words to build a life on. If we work the words into our life, when the river bursts its banks and crashes against the house, nothing can shake it; it is built to last.

One of the ways God builds this kind of life in us is through spiritual disciplines or practices. We are learning a new one each week. We did the breath prayer the first week, and Hannah invited us to write a letter to God last week. This week's practice is known as *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina, Latin for “divine reading,” is an ancient form of scripture reading that helps a person connect with God through scripture. *Lectio* involves both reading and silence, is slow and reflective, and is about experiencing God rather than Bible study. In short, *lectio divina* helps us connect with God through scripture. Today, I want to conclude by walking you through the five steps of this practice, so you might add this practice to your life as a way of partnering with God to build a life that is built to last.

First of all, select a short passage of 6-8 scripture verses. This week, we suggest Luke 6:43-49, our text for today, but you can choose another if you wish. Begin with silence, deep breaths, and awareness of God's presence.

1. **Read:** Read the passage slowly, noticing the word or phrase that catches your attention. Sit in silence, reflecting on the word or phrase.

2. **Meditate:** Read the passage again, asking how this word speaks to you personally - what does it stir in you? Sit in silent reflection.
3. **Pray:** Read the passage again, noticing your response to God and the thoughts and feelings you have. Pray silently, aloud, or by writing about your response.
4. **Contemplate:** Read the passage a final time, resting and releasing all to God. Now that you have expressed your prayer, you can rest fully in God and entrust to God all things that came up in your prayer.
5. **Resolve:** As you go about your day, carry your prayer with you and let it live in you.

Hurricane season in Florida typically lasts from June through November. In life, the storm season is all year long. We never know when a storm will form on the horizon and thunder ashore. Like the wise builder in our text and like the Sand Palace builders, we begin today preparing for the storms by inviting God to renovate our hearts, and through God's grace and our humble efforts, we learn to abide in Christ and make his words the deep and solid foundation we build our lives on.

BENEDICTION:

*Go into your week,
Resting in God,
Abiding in Christ,
Renovated by the Spirit.
Amen.*

ⁱ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/14/us/hurricane-michael-florida-mexico-beach-house.html>

ⁱⁱ Fred Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville: John Know Press, 1990, 93.