

The Way of Jesus: Solid Ground
St. Matthew 7:24

In our home we are often searching for something: my glasses, Sylvia's book, our car keys. Sometimes, it seems we are looking for things in all the wrong places!

In Jesus' day, the poor were looking for the anticipated Kingdom of God. In today's Gospel text, for the past two hundred years, people have longed for the Messiah and the deliverance from the brutality and crushing power of the Roman empire. With the coming of God's Kingdom, Israel would experience peace.

Jesus came with a different definition of the Kingdom, however, a vision that turned the people's world upside down. He preached that people have been searching for the Kingdom of God in all the wrong places. Then, as was often his *modus operandi*, he sat on the hillside and began teaching them what God wanted of them.

When Jesus was done teaching he said these words: *"Not everyone who says these words 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven."* Jesus is saying that they have been hunting for the Kingdom in the wrong places all along.

St. Paul, who never heard Jesus teach, wrote the words to the church in Thessalonica many years following the resurrection. These were instructions about where to look for the Kingdom. Jesus will come from heaven with a loud voice, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet call of God. Those who are dead in Jesus will arise first. Then, those who are alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air, and we will be with God and the saints forever.

St. Paul says this is where we can find the Kingdom of God. It is the hope of believers. But years passed and we find the apostle looking for the Kingdom elsewhere.

We won't find Jesus in the air but we might find him with the martyrs who readily sought out death at the hand of the Romans. To gain entrance into heaven they thought they must become martyrs, must share in the suffering of Jesus. Yet, Jesus never asked a soul to become a martyr.

Then, there were some who believed that if they took vows of poverty and chastity they could work their way into the Kingdom. Living in monasteries or convents away from the world they could earn their way to heaven. But, Jesus never asked anyone to do that.

There are others who think that if they make a lot of noise, or who sing boisterously, or speak in tongues, or who tithe, or who give themselves to many church meetings, or many other things, they will be admitted into Heaven. Again, Jesus never said this.

So, neither making a lot of noise, or singing noisily, or speaking in tongues, or paying your tithes will get you into Heaven. Only doing the will of God, only by following the teaching of Jesus accomplishes that. That is what Jesus says. This is what he says as he brings his disciples together, and shares how God wants them to live their lives here on earth.

Boiled down, does Jesus promise that if we seek to live by his instruction, we will be assured of a place in Heaven after we die? No, not so much.

When Jesus taught on the subject of the Kingdom, he spoke of God reigning now, here, through us, through our obedience to his teaching on earth. If we do this what would that Kingdom look like?

Jesus had some ideas about that because here is what he says: *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine, and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice*

is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash."

Obedience to Jesus' words erects a world on solid ground. Such a society would be unshakeable. It would provide safety, a sure foundation. It would be a world in which all people were valued equally. It would be literally heaven on earth.

It is a magnificent dream, a tremendous ambition, a worthy intention. It declares joy in the attempt and meaning for the journey. Of course, in my seat of criticism it is easy to voice concern: *"It ain't gonna happen! Our world it's too far gone."*

Because the teachings of Jesus are so difficult, so opposite of the 'way of the world,' our culture has found a technique to diffuse the **"Way of Jesus:"** It is Selfishness or self-indulgence if you like.

If we take what Jesus said seriously, we will understand that his goal for us is still to remake the world on the solid foundation of flexibility and simplicity, compassion and mercy, peace and purity of heart. As we look around we see this is difficult to accomplish.

If we forget this teachings of Jesus for whatever reason, it is hard to see how we are believers or followers of the way. This is how I see it: The people who choose wealth and self-indulgence and the collection of 'things,' will be hated by the people they have stolen from, and will always live in paranoia. Those who think they are better than others, or are jealous of others and try to prove their superiority, will cultivate hate wherever they go. Those who self-righteous pass judgment on others, will be judged in the same way. Everyone who does not love their enemies, will perpetuate division and plant seeds of destruction. Those who change the teachings of Jesus will exist with a divided, unfocused heart. This is what happens to a house not build on a solid foundation.

All of us are in the construction business. We are in the process of building our own lives, our own houses, either on a weak foundation or a solid foundation. If we want

a life that does not collapse during storms, then we must do the will of God as Jesus taught and modeled so well.

But, what happens when some of the bricks in the walls of our houses break and fall apart, or the roof leaks? Well, Jesus teaches the mercy and forgiveness of God, and grants us opportunities to ask for it again and again.

The Kingdom of God is both here and yet coming. In the time between now and when it comes in fullness, we are to live compassionately without expecting anything in return; to forgive without keeping track of the times; witnessing without being afraid. Let's build our lives upon the solid rock of Jesus' teachings, for in so doing the Kingdom of God on earth is also built, and the angels in heaven will be singing. Alleluia. Amen.