

# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

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### Someone's Trying to Deceive You

#### Matthew 7:15-29

<sup>5</sup> "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

<sup>24</sup> "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds 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 that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Mt 7:24-27).

So, goes one of the great and most familiar teaching analogies of Jesus' earthly ministry. Spoken as the conclusion to his Sermon on the Mount, it communicates his point so straightforwardly and convincingly that to this day we wonder why would anyone would be so foolish as to purposefully build their house on shifting sands?

But then you remember how three of the fifteen post holes you dug for your deck didn't get all the way down to the required 42" depth. Tree roots got in the way. Or how you didn't scrape, sand, and prime. You just slapped some paint over it. Or how long it's been since your last oil change. Or the real reason I can't consistently break 80 is I've never taken the time to learn – let alone practice – proper fundamentals in my stance, set up and grip.

So, we get Jesus' point alright about hearing his word and putting it into practice. There's no argument. We know we should more than we do. In fact, we wish we would ... we wish we could ... and we're not proud of how often his Word seemingly goes in one ear and out the other. But it's hard. All sorts of things get in the way. On top of that, I'm just a 'measure once, cut twice' kind of guy: naturally lazy, easily distracted, forgetful, naïve, and constantly pressed for time. So, when I consider the meaning of Jesus' wise and foolish builder analogy for my life, I'm moved to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner. And please don't let the poorly supported deck I foolishly built give way that my feeble faith in you fall down with a great crash. Amen."

But what if I told you such an understanding – while certainly warranted given our sinful natures – misses Jesus' immediate point? What if I told you that, while it is certainly possible for your faith to collapse due your foolish neglect of God's Word and its practice in your life, Jesus is really warning you about someone else? Someone who is actively trying to deceive you, and purposefully trying to destroy your Christian faith forever! It's true.

It's what the "therefore" is there for, as in, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice..." It tells us that Jesus house builder analogy flows out of what he had just said in the entire Sermon on the Mount, but most especially in the verses he had just spoken. Those words are not about your personal sinfulness, but about the fact that there are those who are trying to deceive you into being spiritually foolish.

“Watch out for false prophets,” he said. False prophets, plural. There are lots of them. All preaching and teaching and doing things amazing things *in Jesus name* (7:22). But their words are not Jesus’ words and consequently they are not acting in his interest or yours, but in their own. “They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Mt 7:15), telling you your postholes are fine at 4 inches deep while trying to topple the deck with you on it. In the name of “Jesus” the false prophets will not only give you the paint to slap over that exposed and rotting wood, they’ll plant a colony of carpenter ants in the wall behind it when you’re not looking. They’ll promise you sunny neighborhoods of homes with well-kept lawns all built on sand. And all filled with over-achieving people, who never bothered to learn the fundamentals of the faith and don’t bother to hear God’s Word or put it into practice. The false prophets want you to buy into such neighborhoods, precisely because the hurricane of God’s judgment is going to wipe them out.

Jesus says about these false prophets, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father... Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (7:21-23). Jesus totally rejects not just some of the things the false teachers do or say, but everything about them. “Watch out for them,” are most definitely some of the words of his he wants you to hear and put into practice as you build your spiritual house.

Not as some sort of jealous loyalty test, but out of a concern for your safety, your eternal well-being. Remember, “they come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ...” - not benign butterflies ... not daffy ducks ... not well-intentioned but misguided meerkats – “... inwardly they are ferocious wolves,” looking to do you spiritual harm. Similarly, if you attempt to pick grapes from thornbushes or harvest figs from thistles – to use another of Jesus’ analogies (Mt 7:18) – you won’t be merely disappointed, you will get injured! So, watch out, Jesus says here. His Apostle Paul wrote pretty much the same thing to the Roman Christians, putting it this way: “I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” So watch them on TV. Read their books and blogs. Go to their churches and participate in their Bible studies. No. Wait. It actually says, “Keep away from them” (16:17). Because the Christ who lived and died and rose and ascended for you, wants to spend eternity with you. In love he doesn’t want to lose you, because so false teacher deceived you.

In Jesus’ wise and foolish builders analogy the storms that beat against both houses aren’t heart-disease, depression, unemployment, or cultural immorality as serious and difficult those things can be. They’re the false doctrines of false prophets who come disguised as pious preachers of Christ, but inwardly are ferocious wolves, hell-bent on your destruction.

But we are far from defenseless against them! The first line we’ve already established, that not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord’ is a prophet you should listen to. Some are trying to deceive you. Simply accepting this is a common reality is an important first line of defense. The second line is what Jesus says in two different places, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Mt 7:16, 20). Their fruit is their teaching – not their appearance, not their personality, not their success, not even their miraculous powers (7:22). You, Jesus says, can recognize it as false. If you give place to his Word in your life as that First Lesson from Deuteronomy encouraged you to do, false doctrine will stick out like a bad apple. Just check what they teach about justification, the teaching Paul wrote about in the Second Lesson “that a person is justified apart from the works of the law” (Ro 3:28), as all other teachings depend on keeping this one straight. If their rotten on that one, then they’ll be rotten a most all of them. So, have nothing to do with them as Jesus does and as Jesus has told you to.

Finally, the ultimate defense is Christ himself and his own words. They are, as he said in the analogy of the wise and foolish builders, our rock-solid foundation. The winds of false teaching and the deadly storms of spiritual deception absolutely cannot destroy a faith in Christ or a love for him that rests squarely on this sure foundation. It’s not possible. They can only take down, only deceive a faith that’s foolishly built on something else. So, hear these words of Christ about those who seek to deceive you and “put them into practice,” and you will live securely in God’s grace!

Amen.

### **Prayer of the Day**

- P:** O God, you rule over all things in wisdom and kindness. Take away everything that may be harmful and give us whatever is good; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C:** [sung] **Amen.**

### **Prayers of the Church**

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