
Scott L. Thompson
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Luke 6: 39-49

He also told them a parable: 'Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

A Tree and Its Fruit

'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

The Two Foundations

'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.'

I can still remember when they were building the new hockey arena for the best collegiate hockey team in the Midwest, the University of North Dakota Fighting Hawks. It was about 20 years ago or so, and Leanne and I lived only a few short blocks from the site of the new arena construction site. It was going to be a rink like no other, with marble floors in the atrium and leather backed seats in the stands. There would be laser light shows between periods, and it would become

the envy of the other teams of the conference. 100s of millions of dollars were being invested into the new stadium, so there was a lot of pressure to get it right. But there was one problem. The soil in Grand Forks consists of layers of silt and clay. It's a terrible foundation on which to build. If you merely sat the stadium on a slab on top of the topsoil, a flood would wash the foundation away and collapse the building. A minor tremor would shake and wobble the soil and the arena would crack to pieces.

So the engineers had a clever solution to the problem. They took gigantic pylons, and using cranes with enormous blocks dropping repeatedly on the heads of these pylons they drove them down, down, down, deep through the topsoil until after many feet, the pylons met solid bedrock. Once pounded deep into this bedrock, the building was then constructed on a steel framework attached to the pylons that gave the arena a sure and solid foundation. Next time the river floods, and in the Red River Valley, that is always a possibility, the Ralph Engelstad Arena is going nowhere.

Jesus tells us in today's parable that the life of faith is just like this process of building a solid foundation, that our lives as disciples of Jesus need to be founded in solid rock, so that when calamity comes and the flood water of life rise against us, we are secure where we stand. And it's a fitting scripture for today, isn't it? To think about laying a sure foundation, when we welcome into membership our Confirmands, as they declare their faith and decide to make this church their home, and to make you all their church family. It makes you wonder, doesn't it? What makes for a strong, vibrant, Christian faith? And what helps people withstand hardship, and be resilient when hard times come. Well, in these few, short, parables Jesus gives a brief roadmap for what it would take to establish a sure foundation of faithfulness that endures for a lifetime.

The first is to **keep your eyes on Jesus**. Jesus asks, "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?" As a young camp counselor we used to practice what we called a "trust walk." In a trust walk, one person was blindfolded and the other was not. The blindfolded person was led through an obstacle course, tackling small challenges, using only the words and touch of the other to guide them through. It was a trust walk, because the blindfolded one had to fully rely on the other to find their way, and not trip or run into anything, or

accidentally harm themselves. It's completely obvious that a blindfolded one leading another blindfolded one would be a complete failure of a trust walk. If life is one giant trust walk, and we're the ones stumbling around blind, then Jesus is asking us to follow him in order to avoid falling into the pit. We're miss the trail when we think we can go alone, "A disciple is not above the teacher," he says to warn us not to get too far ahead of where he leads us.

But he also promises that we can eventually cast off our blindfolds. He says, yes, that a disciple is "not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher." In other words, we can change, and grow, and become stronger disciples. In other words, if we keep our eyes on Jesus and keep his teachings close to heart, and place his teachings at the center of our being, we can become like him.

Vaughn Crow-Tipton tells this story from Peter Senge's bestselling book, "The Fifth Discipline." He, "Used the example of the movie *Spartacus* to portray the importance of vision. Senge retells the story of a Roman slave and gladiator who led an army of slaves in an uprising in 71 BCE. The slaves twice defeated the Roman legions but in the end were captured by the Roman general Marcus Crassus. Crassus wanted to execute Spartacus but had never seen him. So he said to the captured slaves: "You have been slaves. You will be slaves again. But you will be spared your rightful punishment of crucifixion by the mercy of the Roman legions... (if) you turn over to me the slave Spartacus." At that point, Spartacus rose to spare this troops and said to Crassus, "I am Spartacus." Then to everyone's surprise, the man next to him rose and said, "I am Spartacus." So too the next, and the next man rose, each proclaiming in turn, "I am Spartacus." The slaves had a vision given to them by a guide who could see freedom."¹

The slaves who had followed Spartacus had become his disciples. They had absorbed his teachings. They had gained his vision, and captured his courage. When the test of their true mettle came, they proved that they had fully internalized his teaching. The disciples had become like the teacher.

¹ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), p. 205. As cited in, Crowe-Tipton, Vaughn. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P. 408.

So, how do we get there? How do we become like our teacher? We need to follow Jesus's command to love God and love our **neighbor as yourself**. And the important line here is to love others *as you love yourself*. And we stink at this last bit don't we. Jesus uses the example of the fellow who points out the speck in his neighbor's eye while carrying a log in his own to make this point. It's like the guy who has a shabby lawn that's never mowed, with sticks and leaves and windblown garbage blown all over, who complains about the lonely dandelion in his neighbor's yard. We're all that person at one time or another. And usually we get like this – so focused on our neighbor's shortcomings and failings that we become obsessive over them – when we're too ashamed to face the mess in our own lives. This is why Jesus tells us to love others *as ourselves*. You can't love others, unless you love yourself, and truly know yourself.

If all you see when you look at yourself is a shameful, unlovable, unworthy mess, of course all you're going to see when you look outwards at others is the same – shamefulness, the unlovable, and the unworthy. Pretty soon you'll be seeing specks and dandelions all over the place. The antidote to this is to remember that this is not how Jesus sees you. To Jesus, you are worthy of love and delight. You are forgiven. Jesus wants to know and be known by you. And the way to truly know this truth is to keep your eyes on Jesus, to love God and love your neighbor as yourself, and, finally, to **practice your faith**.

Jesus says that, "no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit... the good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and evil person out of evil treasure produces evil." And this is where it gets real. What sort of evidence of Christ's love are you producing? Are you fixated on specks and dandelions? Are you a tree struggling to bear good fruit? It's good at times like these to remember that the life of faith takes practice. And when practices it yields good, abundant fruit.

This is why I'm so delighted that our Confirmands have decided to make this their church home. Because this is a place where they have decided to practice their faith. Confirmation isn't like a graduation, where you've finished Sunday School and now you're done. No, it's the beginning. It's marks the beginning of full adult membership in the life of the body. It's a commitment to become a disciple alongside you all. To study with you all. Pray with you all. Be in

small groups and youth group with you all. To regularly attend worship with you all. Because the benefits of the life of faith take practice. Bearing the good fruit of a life of Christian faith takes practice.

And it makes sense doesn't it? If I pulled out the sheet music for Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, and randomly picked one of you to come up here and play it on the grand piano, how would you do? If randomly picked one of you to show up in the court room across the street tomorrow morning and to defend a case before the judge, how would you do? If I put one of you on the basketball court this weekend at an NBA game and asked you to lead the offense, how would that go? We know that all of these things take practice, dedication, and long hours of blood, sweat, and tears. The good fruit of a well-played piano concerto takes a mountain of dedication, defending a case in court takes passing the BAR exam after years of study, and playing pro basketball takes 1000s of hours on the court.² But, we seem to be casual about our faith, as if we can be casual about it, and not actually *practice it*. As Vaughn Crowe-Tipton asks, "What makes anyone think becoming a Christian, living the life of faith, even with the very grace of God, will not take work, practice, and dedication following Christ's call."³

If, right now, you're looking at your foundation, and instead of seeing pylons driven deep into the bedrock to withstand mighty floods, and you are instead seeing a sand castle on a storm-tossed beach, I wanted to let you know that it's not too late to make a change. You can make the same decision that these confirmands have made today. They've decided to follow Jesus. They've decided to walk with him, to love God and love their neighbor as themselves. They've decided to make this church family a place where they can practice their faith, and to grow more like Jesus. My hope and prayer is that, whether it's here with this great group of Christians, or in another one like it, that you will choose to do the same. May it be so.

Alleluia and Amen.

² Crowe-Tipton, Vaughn. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P. 409.

³ Crowe-Tipton, Vaughn. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P. 409.