

Sermon on the Mount #3: The House Built Upon the Rock

Matthew 7:24-29, 1 Corinthians 3:10-14 by Patty Friesen (Feb. 16/20)

MDS Tribute: Ed Buhler

Tomorrow is the anniversary of Art Zacharias' death. In his grandchildren's Blackfoot tradition, death anniversaries are recognized with feasts, sometimes for up to ten years and as a family, the Zacharias' have invited us over to the Seniors' Centre for a feast after church in Art's memory. We hope they do this for the next ten years! This death anniversary is an opportunity for us as church family as well to heal and use Art's life as a teaching on the last of our series on The Sermon on the Mount. As Edna has often wryly said, if Art didn't want so much attention - he shouldn't have died at church.

Both the gospel and the epistle reading today talk about building a firm foundation on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is foundational scripture for we Mennonites. Like pouring a concrete foundation for Mennonite Disaster Service - faith and life go hand in hand like concrete and tie rods. Menno Simons said, True Evangelical Faith cannot lie sleeping. It clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, binds up the broken-hearted and releases prisoners.

Christian writer Jim Wallis said, "I had never heard a sermon in my home church about the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5,6,7 – which I can now see was meant to turn the world upside down. I later learned that the Sermon on the Mount was foundational scripture for new followers of the Way – which is what people who decided to believe and follow Jesus were called before they were named Christians. But these teachings were never taught in my church growing up and neither was Jesus' **way**

discussed as a **way of life**, but rather as a system of beliefs. We were never taught the **way** of Jesus in my church or that there even was one. (Christ in Crisis, p. 212)

Writer Craig Keener also confesses, “Until my conversion in 1975 I professed to be an atheist in part because I looked at the roughly 85 percent of my fellow citizens who claimed to be Christians and could not see that their faith genuinely affected their lives. I reasoned that if even Christians did not believe in Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, why should I? Keener went on to become a Mennonite professor of biblical studies, comments on the Beatitudes, :If we truly repent in the light of the coming kingdom, we will treat our neighbours rightly. No one who has humbled themselves before God can act with wanton self-interest.”

Mennonite Ethics professor Glen Stassen describes the Sermon on the Mount as God’s transforming initiative. “The Sermon on the Mount is not about human striving toward high ideals but about **God’s** transforming initiative to deliver us from the cycles in which we get stuck. It has a realistic view of our world and it announces that in the midst of such bondage, there is also another force operating: God is also beginning to rule with justice and peace, like mustard seeds beginning to grow or leaven beginning to spread. The Sermon on the Mount describes specific ways we can participate in the new initiatives that God is taking like humbling ourselves, forgiving others, not sinning in our anger, praying the Lord’s Prayer (Christ in Crisis, p. 251).

Art lived this creed of faith in action in the Sermon on the Mount to the limit of his bodily health. I thought for sure that Edna would want something from the Sermon on the Mount at Art’s funeral but right away she asked for the 1 Corinthians 13 Love Chapter because he believed faith was not just about action but about **love** in action.

Continuing with the metaphor of building a house on a rock: on the Anabaptist foundation of faith in action, Art framed up walls of love with 2x4s of patience, kindness, humility, respect, trust, and perseverance nailed together with forgiveness, and forbearance. Art knew the qualities of living peaceably and humbly with our loved ones at home and with others at church and within the faith community. In between the 2x4s of love, patience and humility he placed the insulation of music. Music was Art's prayer language. From gospel music to German hymns to silly Low German songs with Joy Singers, music filled Art's life and created a warm insulation for others.

Over the 2x4 framing and insulation came the drywall of humour and to live happily in marriages, family and community - we need a sense of humour, even if it is dry also. Art loved jokes, which he wrote out by hand at home and hurriedly carried across the church parking lot in time for the church newsletter. Art was quick with the one-liners and play on words - making one whole MDS announcement in alliteration, which endeared him to me forever.

60 years ago last August, Art and Edna built a home of love. Their home grew to include Sherma and Kelly and grew even larger to include Sheila, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Sometimes home expansion was a stretch for Art. It wasn't always easy and there were growing pains but their home did grow even larger to include their church community and Osler community and all who needed electrical work. Their home grew even bigger to include the people they met in Voluntary Service in Arizona and at Bethany Manor and Shekinah Retreat Centre and in Mennonite Disaster Service all over North America as Ed testified to this morning.

As our gospel lesson shows us - the wise person who builds their house on a rock withstands the storms of life. The materials that the master builder uses also bear the test of floods and flame. We know in Mennonite Disaster Service that storms rock homes, pulling shingles off the roof and shaking the walls to the foundation. A sudden death of a loved one is like a storm that pulls the roof off and lets the rain in. This past year has been our MDS grief work of putting the roof back on our church and Edna has been a powerful example of how to be sad and yet stay connected to people. Her ability to share her grief process at Dan Epp-Thiessen's workshop and on Memorial Sunday and at Christmas with the poem First Christmas in Heaven has shown us all how to grieve well.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10 - Paul suggests that some build foundations that others who come afterwards build upon. The suggestion is that we are all a generational part of building projects of love in action and that each generation carefully chooses the materials we use to keep building. Art's singing voice and funny quips and life of service has ended here on earth but as the next generations, we are spiritually reconstructing the House Upon the Rock in our faith community and also physically reconstructing a home for someone else through our MDS Project this spring in memory of Art. This is how the House Built Upon the Rock continues from generation to generation.

Let us pray...Loving God, thank you for your holding presence with us this past year and thank you for this community gathered here today to remember Art. Help us grieve and laugh and love and eat well today. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sung Benediction: How Firm a Foundation #567