

## “Building Our House on the Rock” by Rev. Denice K Leslie

Denice K. Leslie  
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Matthew 7:21- 29  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

### “Building Our House on the Rock”



I will never forget the year it rained so much that the Yuba River flooded. That was in 1995. It had been raining non-stop all over the majority of northern California for weeks on end.

One day in April my mother was upstairs in their hillside home on the central coast when she glanced up at the window and saw a huge pine tree *move* slowly past the window, and then another and another... She jumped up and looked out in time to see the ground liquefy to mud and the dirt and trees between her home and the neighbors slip down the hillside onto the house below them!

My folks realized in an instant they could lose the whole house. A call went out to friends and church. Very quickly people gathered with trucks and ropes and hauled furniture, books and belongings out of the house and into neighbor's garages.

In the midst of this the house shifted and I remember my dad's desperation as he told me over the phone "We're losing the house." It was an awful moment. Soil was silting away under the back foundation which was now hanging in mid air some four feet over the hill without support.

I remember the careful planning that went into the construction of this long dreamed of retirement home.

Every board, every nail my mom and dad had put in place themselves. My mother photographed each phase. It took them three years of weekends driving up from the south of Los Angeles on Friday evening and returning home on Sunday nights in time to go back to work on Monday morning. They camped on the property while they built.

I remember being amazed at the thickness of the cement foundation—which my dad explained had to be a certain thickness especially as the house would be built on the side of the hill and the pad had to support three levels—the garage level, the first level of the house and a second loft level.

They had a soil analysis done in order to determine the stability of the hillside and to locate the pad for the house on the most stable portion.

They chose well. The house held—it was built mostly on bedrock. Once the wet weather subsided they had anchors—Chase anchors they're called—shaped like huge corkscrews, attached to the foundation of the house and bored into the bedrock. Earth was replaced and a huge cement wall was built at the base of the hill—we call it the Great Wall of Partridge.

During the more recent San Simeon earthquake the house swayed around but flexed and held to the rock! Things flew around inside the house but the house itself came through all in one piece!

In today's gospel lesson Jesus counsels us to build our house on a rock solid foundation. He says, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock."

My folks had to build the foundation and then build the house before they could take up residence in it. This is an important part of Jesus' message for us today.



Jesus “challenges us to recognize how the health of a house (and its inhabitants) depends on what we build it upon. The wholeness of the house, he tells us, rests on its foundation.

And for Jesus, our tangible response to him forms the foundation of our dwelling with him. Our practices, our searching, our work to live out his call: these acts are blessings that sustain the structure and help its inhabitants flourish.”<sup>1</sup>

Christian author Jan Richardson asks us, “What are you building your life on? What are the practices that give wholeness to the house of your life? Are there any places in the foundation that feel shaky? Is there someone you could ask for help as you build? What’s the dream house of your soul look like?”

You see the challenges of living our lives as inhabitants of the House of Christ are so great that only those committed to the necessary soul work need apply. Soul work is the foundation of the house.

Listen to this paraphrase of Jesus words to those of us who claim to be his followers:

“You can’t bluff your way into the realm of heaven by dropping my name and prattling on about what a high view of my authority you hold. It is those who walk the walk who will get in — those who actually live the way God wants them to live.

When the day comes, many people will appeal to me saying, ‘Lord, Lord, look at all the great things we did in your name. We preached; we took on the forces of evil and won; we were real movers and shakers.

We did all sorts of impressive things and we gave you the credit for it all. Doesn’t that count for anything?’ But I will tell them straight, ‘I’ll have nothing to do with you. You are a bunch of pretenders, and rotten to the core. Get out of my sight!’

“The people who take notice of what I teach and put it into practice are like experienced builders who always put down solid foundations before building a house. When violent storms come, or even if cyclones and floods hit, that house stands firm, rock-solid on its foundations.

But those who hear my teachings and don’t bother doing anything about them are like brainless do it fast and take the money contractors who knock up a house with nothing but sand for foundations. The first time it is hit by a decent storm, the wind and rain rip into it and in no time at all there is a spectacular crash and down it comes!”<sup>2</sup>

“As Jesus highlights in the opening verses of this passage, it’s possible to do really impressive work, work that seems holy on the surface, but is empty because it’s focused on results—on a show of power—rather than on relationship with the one who is the source of true power. “I never knew you” is the lament that Jesus, in Matthew 7.23, predicts he will utter to those who hear but do not respond.”<sup>3</sup>

So what does the foundation of our house look like? What’s does Jesus require it to be made of?

It begins with soul work. Soul work is about understanding the heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel is knowing Jesus and what he does.

<sup>1</sup> Jan Richardson, Painted Prayer Book House Dreaming, May 28, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Laughing Bird Prepares A Head. 6/1/08

<sup>3</sup> OpCit.

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What does Jesus do? He practices radical hospitality. That means he has unconditional regard for those his society labels as sinners, seeing each and every person as a creature of God—he welcomes them, keeps company with them and eats with them.

If we watch Jesus closely we see he spends most of his time with those in need, those shunned by his society and the crowds of people on the bottom rung of society who flocked to hear him: teaching, feeding, listening, healing, praying for them.



Jesus prays. He keeps daily, sometimes hourly, company with God through ongoing conversation with God.

He teaches us to pray for each other as well as for others.



Jesus is well acquainted with the will of God through scripture—the nature and activity of God at work in the people of God to bring whole making to people and nations. He finds his call in the prophet Isaiah to preach good news to the poor and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed.



Jesus spoke prophetically –he spoke truth to power when it was called for without regard to the consequences to himself. He was loyal to God’s way over society’s way and spoke up for God’s way when people or kings used their power for themselves and not for their people.



These are the soul tending things Jesus calls us as his disciples to do. When we do these things we build our house on a sure foundation.

It isn’t enough to come into the church, take up residence as members, get involved in activities, drop Jesus’ name and think we are Christian. We are not. Not until we practice seeking God’s will—learning through scripture who God is and what God is about. Who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. Embracing people as Jesus’ embraced them. Speaking God’s word of correction to our world, as needed.

Not until we meet and pray together, as often as we meet together to run the church or engage in activities of the church; not until we embrace Christ will our house be built on rock.