

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'" There were those in the early church who used the words, "Lord, Lord" as a magic formula. They used the name to bring a mere temporary peace to slaves victimized by their masters. They used the words to "cast out demons" but granted no new life. They turned worship into a racket – temporarily appealing, but in the long run it condemned more than it helped.

Worship is not a substitute for worth.

A minister develops a stained-glass voice and his religion becomes a profession – that is, it is something merely professed.

The emphasis of our text for today – those who do the will of God. It is not about a works righteousness religion. Our doing is not earning us a place in God's Kingdom. The hearers know they stand in the grace of God. It is about living in this Kingdom of God. It is about being the people we are called to be. I will admit that sometimes it is difficult to discern the will of God. Sometimes, it is because I don't want to do it. I do believe that its main direction is always clear. Shallow religion, shallow commitment that has no root will soon wither away from our living.

The early church was a mixture of good and evil. It did not always do the will of God. It has made many mistakes and those mistakes are still being made. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church at its meeting in Dallas a few weeks ago voted that the minister of a local church has the authority to deny church membership to people he thinks are not worthy of membership. Of course, the resolution was to appease the Good News Movement in the church – the fundamentalist group that does not want Gay/lesbian persons ordained to ministry – and I guess, they don't even want them in the church. It is foreign to my understanding of the inclusive love of God. I don't see how the minister can invite people to communion by saying "All are welcome at the Lord's Table." Seems to me it is not the Lord's Table anymore. It is the Minister's table.

Our Text in Matthew for today tells one of my favorite stories. It is about two builders who built on a dry watercourse. They obviously built in the summer when it was dry. One just built his house on the sand without foundation. The other searched for a rock foundation under the sand and built his house on that rock foundation. The floods came. Floods mean a stream. In winter, when the rain came, the dry watercourse became a stream. The house with no foundation fell to the stream of water. One builder had an eye on the future and the other casually begins to build in the easiest way. There is a camp song.

"Don't build your house on the sandy land, don't build it too near the shore, It may look nice, but you will have to build it twice, you'll have to build that house once more..

You better build your house upon a rock. On a firm foundation, on a solid spot.

Winds may come and go but the peace of God you will know.

There are different seasons in our lives. We would do well to keep to a firm foundation in our living.

It may not be the easy way, but it will sustain us when the storms of life blow upon us.

The text says the common people who heard Jesus were astounded at his teaching. Jesus is not a scribe. He has no religious credentials. Yet the people were astonished because he spoke as one having

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authority. The scribes quoted their authority – no scribe would speak unless he could prove his words by past wisdom. So the scribes drew stale water from closed cisterns.

The words of Jesus were like a spring – clear, fresh with power to nourish the soul.

Where did Jesus get this authority?

To me, he had the authority of silence. He knew what others said. He knew what others had said.

But when he spoke the spirit was his own. When someone speaks the truth it resounds with us – it is like “I’ve always known that, deep down, even though I had no words to say it. Jesus had that authority.

Jesus had the authority of love. Jesus was not like the scribes. They drew their robes about them lest they be contaminated by touching a “sinner” who knew nothing of the law. Jesus spoke out of compassion. He cried for a friend. He healed the sick. He played with the children.

He had the authority of love.

I must admit I have trouble with the Old Testament lesson for today. I know that the story of the Flood and the Ark is familiar. I cringed when a church member wanted to buy Leigh and David this elaborate ark set up – animals and all. I talked her out of it. I knew if we had that ark it would not be long before Leigh would ask why they needed the ark. I was taught by my parents and Sunday School teachers that God is Love. I did not know how to explain the flood story without saying that God got mad and destroyed all humans except Noah and his family. That is a God that is foreign to me – still is. I remind you that the writer made an attempt to help the story. The writer wrote that the rainbow is in the sky to remind God not to send another flood, ever!!

Jesus had the authority of love.

Jesus had the authority of life. Religion is not just words. Our text is telling us today that faith is the living behind those words. Early in Jesus’ ministry – on a trip back to his home town, there is a quote “the people marveled at his gracious words.” The words had the authority of living behind them.

Authority – it speaks to life. I think that is what resonates in my life when I hear the UCC slogan, “Whoever you are, where ever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” I believe that is why the people were astounded by the teaching of Jesus. It spoke words, gracious words about God caring for them. The gracious words are also about God caring for us.