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James 2:14-17, Proverbs 21:1-8, Matthew 7:24-27
“Rock Solid Faith”

In this neatly packaged visible box is a “Jesus action figure.” It was given to me as a Christmas gift. It’s made in China for “*Accoutrements – Outfitters of Popular Culture.*”

I looked at it in the spirit it was given – humorously – and while thinking about the joy this gift would give me someone said that the figure was a collector’s item and was more valuable if it remained in the box. This was a few years ago and as you see it’s still in the box.

It has remained in the box because I have been waiting for the opportune time to speak about it and to open it. This is the time. I will tell this story to the children in an upcoming “time for the younger church” and open it then. Somehow that seems a more fitting time to bring this Jesus into the world.

It doesn’t take a whiz kid to wonder how an *action* figure – and especially a Jesus action figure – would be more valuable in a box than outside a box. An inactive action figure is an oxymoron.

That might be the point of the cover quote: “Nobody can teach you how to be Christian – you learn it on the job.” The value of a good education is practicing what we learn. Actions speak louder than words. I can read a recipe for a cake but until I follow the recipe as best I can and bake the cake the knowledge is close to naught.

Before I move on to the Gospel text I shall communicate another inaction/action story to support the primary point of the text. I told the children last Sunday that I had surfed the day before on my new surfboard.

I was sitting on my surfboard in the pristine ocean surroundings of Linda Mar at Pacifica. The views and vistas from the ocean beyond the waves are magnificent anywhere. I was waiting for a wave reflecting on the surfboard as an analogy for Jesus and the ocean an analogy for God and how the board connects me to the ocean as Jesus connects me to God.

As lovely as this was there was no action. I wasn’t surfing. It was only when a wave came and I turned and paddled and harnessed the energies of the wave that I experienced the synergy of body, board and wave and on a deeper level my relationship to God in Christ.

I was grateful and joyful. I was inspired to ensure that God’s wonderful water and waves were always there in perfect condition for human beings and sea life to enjoy. That will

take another form of action: beach cleanups, monitoring the way oil is extracted from the sea, controlling pollution, over fishing and the like.

The action figure and surfing stories make the same point that Jesus makes in the Gospel text today. At the end of his now famous “Sermon on the Mount,” 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.

“And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

I read the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7 in Matthew, before writing this sermon and there are a whole lot of brilliant and challenging words there, including the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer. The latter alone is enough to keep us going for a lifetime as we are learning in the three-part sermon series in three weeks surrounding today.

One is solidly grounded only if one hears Jesus’ words and does them. As action figures we get out of the boxes of our lives and get involved the best we can. We can rest and wait and look around at God’s beautiful world but we don’t *really* connect with God until we get engaged.

What do we do? Jesus provides a focus: Everyone then who hears *these words of mine* and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. In other words, soak in the Sermon on the Mount (and all the words of Jesus) and see what God is saying to you in the words and act on them.

It might be a good idea for each of us to read Matthew 5-7 this week and see what speaks to you. Some of it is radical and needs level-headed interpretation but most of it is quite clear.

Jesus shows the way. It’s our task to interpret what he says (that’s the hard part) and act on it. An aside: I say the interpretation is the hard part because that’s where we need to be most caring and responsible. How responsible is the pastor in Florida who wants to burn the Qur’an? His interpretation of scripture is more ideological than theological. It’s bad theology. It’s *Theos* without *logos*, in other words, God devoid of reason. It cannot be faithful to the words of Jesus who said “Love your enemies.”

“Everyone then who hears *these words of mine* and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

Look at the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.” I want to be loved so I love. I want to be treated with respect so I treat others with respect. I respect the sacred books of others as I would have them respect my sacred book. That’s a relatively easy teaching.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

What about Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God?”

On face value this seems simple. It's not. What does it mean to be peacemakers in our complex world? The UN has peacekeepers – military folk who go around the world keeping the peace the best they can, not without controversy in some countries.

Keeping the peace is action but Jesus is more emphatic. We are to be makers or doers of peace. We begin with ourselves, move into our homes, neighborhoods, community, country and world. If I could I would build a Peace Pentagon and fund it with half the money given to the War Pentagon in Washington DC.

Suellen bought a bumper sticker this past week that carries the American flag and states: “Peace is patriotic.” There's an election coming up and I can support candidates and propositions that support peace.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

One more response to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: He says, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father (your Parent) in heaven.”

“You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works...” That's a good one. How are we light to the world and how do we let our light shine? The shining light in each of us is “good works.” What's a good work? We know: Its compassion, peace and social justice. It's helping someone in need. It's offering a kind and caring word. We know and so we act – again and again.

There is enough in the Gospels – the words of Jesus – to carry us through a life time of significant action. They are the words for rock solid faith when we act upon them.

A Homecoming Sunday sermon, I guess, is supposed to be a word that inspires and encourages us for the next church year. It's clear: We are strong when we hear Jesus' words and act on them and we fall when we hear Jesus' words and do not act on them.

Good work upholds and supports the church and our lives in God's beautiful world. We are called to nothing less than rock solid faith. Amen.