

“Location, Location, Location!”

May 16, 2021

Are We There Yet? Series

7th Sunday of Easter, Children’s Sunday

In-person & Livestream

Thanks to Lillian and her family for helping us to see Jesus’ words...

Are we there yet? has been our guiding question in this season of Easter. We want to get to our destination by the best route without delays. We don’t want to get caught in traffic or construction.

Today we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, but I hope it won’t be the end of hearing the challenge of Jesus’ words. It’s a good idea to keep these chapters in front of us as we keep on going on this journey with Jesus. He challenges us to always think about our journey of discipleship and keeps us in check - reminding us that life lived in his love really is a journey of asking: Are we following him? *Are we there yet?*

Last week, we focused on Jesus’ call to trust in God’s presence and care, and if we keep reading, Jesus keeps offering the challenge of living in the Kingdom way. *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. Ask and it shall be given...seek and you will find...knock and the door will be opened. Do to others as you’d have them do to you. Enter through the narrow gate that leads to life. Watch out for false prophets. Look at the fruit that someone’s life bears.* More fruit when we dive into the fruit of the Spirit this summer. We’ve heard this before. We know it’s important. These are foundational.

And today’s lesson is no exception. First, there’s the powerful image of walking the talk - doing our faith and seeking God’s will with our lives, not just saying that we love Jesus and we believe in Jesus or that we know what he says.

SHOW SLIDE: Iceberg image of BEING and DOING

That relationship between being and doing is important. Our worldview, our assumptions, our beliefs, and our values all undergird our behavior. And Jesus has been talking about our motivation and intention throughout this sermon. Why do we do what we do? How do we stay grounded in God’s way?

The Church over the ages has struggled and even fought over what this means. Is it faith alone? What about our good works? How are they related? And I want to be clear that it’s also not a call to simply “doing” without also “being.”

SHOW SLIDE: Jackie Chan quote: *Being still and doing nothing are two completely different things.* In our United Methodist tradition, there’s a deep connection between personal holiness and social holiness - how our being and doing are connected - how they must be connected. God’s grace is a free gift to us, and we respond to God’s grace

in how we live, give, and serve. To use John Wesley's explanation of grace, we believe in prevenient grace that is there before we recognize it. We are justified (justifying grace) by the saving acts of Jesus Christ, but we are sanctified (sanctifying grace) by how we respond to the saving acts of Christ.

We know this comes to bear when we hear stories from people who feel unwelcome or unwanted in the church. They have been hurt by those who would claim to love God, but then don't act like it. Over and over, there's an integrity lesson here. I wonder if Jesus is pushing us beyond knowing what Scripture says and calling us to live the Good News of God wherever we are. Do our words and actions go together? Do they match? *Are we there yet?*

Jesus calls us to an active faith grounded in him - what we know about him, what we see him do, what we understand to be God's revelation in him. It's not enough to simply call him "Lord." We're called to take on all that he's said in this foundational teaching, and that's more than saying the right words or calling him the right name. Our faith shows in our lives through our obedience to God. So, there's the integrity issue - walking the walk.

Second, there's the image of where we build our spiritual foundation. I'd like to think that both of these builders thought they were building on secure ground. Dry sand feels sturdy, doesn't it? I still marvel at the way footprints wash away at the beach. It doesn't matter how many times I go to the lake; I always find myself marveling at the way that wave washes away whatever is imprinted in the sand, filling the deepest holes or toppling the most intricate sandcastle. **SHOW SLIDE: Sandcastle**

So, it's not the knowledge of the builders that matters as much as it may be their insight and vision. Having a sense of vision for the future matters here. The wise builder decides where to build based on the potential of a future flood and the danger it brings. And the result is clear!

Today we've heard the witness of how important foundations are - and especially a faith foundation offered in worship (whether we're gathered here or at home), community, support from a church family, and remembering our connections. It matters for kids, youth, and adults.

I heard one of our kids say yesterday how glad she was to be around "my church people." Connections and community. I know for me and my family that the church is an extension of what it means to be a family - relationships of trust, help, and care. I called a dentist who was a part of our church in Ravenna when Ana hit her chin, and we weren't sure if she needed stitches. And I've seen us care for another that way - sharing the knowledge and skills we have to help each other.

I can't even count how many times I've heard someone say that they don't know what they'd do without their church - especially in times of crisis and grief - but also in moments of celebration! I had the blessing of meeting Maesyn Joy Boss, a newborn baby who has been prayed for and welcomed in our life together.

Jesus calls us to look in our hearts at our own foundations. What's our foundation? Why do we do what we do? Jesus invites us to build our life grounded in him. So are we there yet? Is our life built on Christ - or on something or someone else? If you've built it on a family member or friend or mentor or even a pastor, you may be disappointed at some point if you haven't been already. We are human beings who try to be faithful, but we are not the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the world. *All other ground is sinking sand...*

Those who hear and act on Jesus' teachings are like the wise builder. It's not just reciting a creed, and it's not just doing mighty deeds. It's both. The image for me is a cross - grounded in God and extended out to the world God loves. That's the core of living as a disciple of Jesus - someone who is always following, learning, and growing in his love - no matter our age, from the youngest among us to the most seasoned. We are always learning, always growing, always seeking to follow more closely and do God's will.

Thanks be to God! Amen.