

Sermons from Park Hill: May 25, 2008

**Sermons from
Park Hill Congregational UCC
Denver, Colorado**

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**Matthew 7: 24-27
“Where to Build Your House”**

One of my favorite songs from Vacation Bible School was “the wise man built his house upon a rock, the wise man built his house upon a rock, the wise man built his house upon a rock, and the rain came falling down. And the rain came down and the flood came up, the rain came down and the flood came up, the rain came down and the flood came up and the house was standing still. The foolish man built his house upon the sand...and the house came tumbling down – or went “splat.” Complete with actions and sound effects.

Here’s the story the song is based upon: Jesus said, “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.” Or, as I prefer, and the house went “splat.”

But what are those words to hear and do?

First: Before you leave work on Friday, make sure you mention as often as you can that you’ll be busy going to church on Sunday. And on Saturday, especially on a nice long holiday weekend, make sure everyone knows what a great sacrifice you will be making by attending worship tomorrow on such a nice day. You’ll make God very proud that you are sharing the message of how religious you are. And everyone around you will be impressed too. They may even consider going, if it’s raining or something else better doesn’t work out.

Secondly: When you pray, make sure everyone sees you. What’s the good of prayer if nobody notices? Maybe they’ll even feel guilty enough to pray themselves. And what a good example you will have been!

Third: When the next church rummage sale comes around, make sure you give something that others will notice is gone from your house. Such as, when you’re having a dinner party, ask a guest, “Would you go get that dish from the cabinet? Oh no! That’s right, I gave it to my church. Oh dear, I wish I hadn’t gotten rid of that!” Think what an inspiration you’ll be! You know, later, when they see something in their house that they want to get rid of, they might be prompted to pawn it off, excuse me, generously give it to your church. (But always make sure to get a receipt for your taxes.)

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Fourth: If someone asks you for your coat, tell them how valuable it is and hang on to it. If someone begs from you, refuse to acknowledge that they're standing there, walk right past, or look them in the face and say, "Get a job." And never, ever, loan your brother-in-law any money.

Fifth: As long as you have an excuse, it's OK to punish a friend or neighbor or family member with your silence or words behind their back. If you have a problem with them, don't tell them. Just let them figure it out on their own. "They know what they've done." If you have a grudge against someone, keep it. You're justified. After all, your feelings were hurt. You were certainly at no fault. So hang on to it, because grudges are good. They remind us who is good and who is bad, and to keep the score even.

Sixth: Find creative ways – this one preferably so no one notices – to get everything you can from everyone possible. Your enemies, of course, but also your family, friends, co-workers. If somehow your boss accidentally gets something extra from you, make sure you get repaid. How dare they get away with taking advantage of you. And if one of your co-workers gets you to buy candy for their kid's school fund drive, make sure they buy something from you too. We've got to keep these things even, you know.

Seventh: Make sure you teach your children that if someone is threatening to hit you, hit them first – with a bigger stick than they've got. Knock them out and they'll leave you alone. Remember, walking away from a fight is for suckers. Talking is for sissies. Enemies need to know you won't be bothered by trying to understand them.

Eighth: When you find that you don't any more room to buy new clothes, build a larger, walk-in closet – or just get a bigger house – but make sure it's cedar so that moths can't get it. To make sure you protect all your wonderful possessions, try putting an electric fence all around your property. That keeps people away. And in fact, to make it even more secure, get a pit bull too. But, if you still can't fit any more into your house, go rent one of those self-storage units – and then you can keep buying. But remember, always make sure your possessions are secure.

Ninth: Don't worry about accumulating a lot of stuff. The problem is simply having enough room for all of it. Why not get it while you can. God made everything, so why wouldn't God want us to have a little bit of everything, as much as we can? In fact, one TV preacher said last week, "God wants you to be wealthy." So there.

Tenth: And this you should worry about: Make sure you have enough food in the house for a long weekend. You have to think ahead so you won't have to go out and get more chips during a great TV show. While you're at it, make sure you have enough cloths so you only have to wash twice a month. Why spend so much time doing laundry when we could be having more fun? Why do today what could be put off until tomorrow?

Eleventh: Why put so much energy into trying *not* to judge. Do what's natural and more fun: Tell people what you think, and don't worry how they'll take it. Why bother worrying about whether or not it's wrong. We do it anyway. So judge people for their taste in ugly clothes, their awful hair (did you see her?!), their stupid choices, their

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ignorant beliefs... You get the idea. Go with the flow.

As far as I can tell, the sum of the law is this: get everything you can, in every way you can; don't worry about stepping on or over others, because life is supposed to be fun and easy. People are supposed to be impressed by how religious you are.

Sacrifice is for suckers, feelings are for the weak. Someone else will take care of it – like the poor – because after all, they'll always be with us.

So, everyone who hears these words and does them will be like the man who built his house on... Which? The beach? Who doesn't want an ocean view, fresh breezes? A great view, until the rain comes down and the floods come up. And great is its fall.

But everyone who hears *these* words and acts on them will be like the man who built his house on a rock. So hear this summary of Jesus' teachings from Matthew 5, 6, and 7. See if you can hear anything different, distinctive, and especially listen to hear whether there are things you really wish Jesus would have kept his hands off.

First: So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, 'Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go the second also. Give to everyone

who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the street corners so that they can be seen by others.

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.

Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal.

You cannot serve God and wealth.

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's troubles are enough for today.

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.

In everything, do to others as you would have them to do you; for this is the law and the prophets.

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Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

I find the contrast striking, and challenging, and occasionally disturbing. But the spiritual life is not simply about having common sense, as weird as that sounds. Common sense says, "make sure you have a good retirement plan." Jesus said, "don't worry about tomorrow." That's why the spiritual life isn't simply a checklist of do's and don'ts. It's about growing into faithfulness. Even Mother Theresa, the epitome of a saint, doubted whether she was worthy, whether she was doing enough. But hear the challenge from Jesus and pay attention to where his words pinched our conscience. That may be the very next thing you need to spend more time in prayer about – in your closet.