

“Straw, Sticks,, and Bricks”

I Corinthians 15:51-58/Matthew 7:24-27/Psalms 1:1-3

First Presbyterian Church of Sharon

May 17, 2026/7th Sunday of Easter

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I. Introduction

Straw, sticks,, and bricks, all used to build three different homes. We know the story. It's the story of the “three little pigs” and “the big bad wolf.” Two of the pigs choose an easier way of building; one with straw the other with sticks,. Their homes go up quickly. And the homes won't stand when the wolf comes to call. But the third little pig, he's different. He builds with bricks. It takes a while. It's harder work. But when the wolf comes to call, the house stands.

The familiar story is a children's moral tale. It's a story to teach an important life lesson; short cuts and easier ways often fail. There are “big, bad wolves.” And they always do come to call sooner or later. So, is it straw, sticks, or bricks? How will you build your life? Choose wisely. Build smartly. Have a longer view.

II. Texts and Brief Exegesis

All the scriptures this morning have to do with the building of a life. They have to do with choices. And they have to do with the implications of those choices.

Psalms 1 (our Call to Worship) announces a blessing on those who choose to build their lives a particular way. Blessed will be those in life who: don't follow the advice of the wicked; or take the way of sinners; or sit in the seat of those who scoff at God's ways. Rather they delight in the way of life directed by God's way. It's like living in dry desert area and planting a tree along the shore of a stream. In all the seasons of life, even in the harshest driest season, the tree thrives and produces fruit. It's like building with bricks. Note the promise is not you won't have problems. Dry seasons are a part of this life, as are wolves. But that you'll come through the problems and produce a life of value and goodness. You'll live a life demonstrating the ways of God.

Jesus has the same thing in mind in our familiar parable from Matthew 7. It concludes a collection of Jesus' teachings called “The Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus has taught about prayer, forgiveness, generosity, obedience, priorities, and trusting God. His point has been that what we believe in, what we “really” believe in, shapes our choices, our values, our ways of life. Jesus wants followers to know that belief is about following him and his way of life. It's different, harder at times, but filled with hope.

So, as he concludes this “Sermon on the Mount” he comes back to it again. Is it “sand” or “rock?” One way is easier. The other harder. It sounds like “straw, sticks, or bricks” doesn’t it? One will wash away in the storms of life. One will stand. Note again the promise is not “No storms.” Rather the promise is about what stands. “Sand or rock,” how do you build? What do you believe? How do you live? What do you trust?

As Paul draws his discussion of resurrection to a close in I Corinthians 15, I think he has something similar in mind. In his discussion he’s talked about the centrality of Christ’s resurrection. And it’s resurrection in some type of body fit for God’s new creation. Paul then discusses our own resurrection. As Christ was raised, so shall we be raised. Also, with some type of body fit for God’s new creation. And it will be each of us personally; mind, heart, and soul. As a seed sown in the ground becomes a plant, carrying some of the nature of the seed but in a different form, so we are sown in death (dust returning to dust) and raised carrying the nature of who we were but in a different form.

Paul knows the discussion has gotten “deep” at times. So, as he concludes, he sums it up. He says, “What I’m saying is that this body can’t be part of God’s eternal new creation. It’s made of dust; part of this world. So, we will be given a new body; one fit for the new creation and eternal life. And everyone will be uniquely personal; you will be you. But beyond much more than that, it’s a great mystery. Staring into God’s good and faithful plan, there’s a lot left to wonder and ponder. But we trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who gives us that victory over sin and death.

Now Paul could have ended right there, but he didn’t. He didn’t because he believes that the great hope of resurrection changes how we live now. And so Paul concludes with: “Therefore, my good friends, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (I Cor. 15:58)

The resurrection means that sin and death are not the end, not the final word. So, we do the work and way of Jesus in this life because that is what will be carried forward somehow into God’s new creation. It is not done in vain. And we continue to shape a life and a character and a heart and a mind and a soul that is also the work and way of Jesus because that will also be carried forward in our resurrection. Just as Jesus was personally Jesus but in a new body, so we too will be personally ourselves but in a new body. The character we build here will continue to be built in the wonder and glory and eternity of God’s new creation. And so all that work of becoming more like Christ is not done in vain. Rather it somehow carries through to the resurrection. Amen to that.

III. Brief Theological Reflection

In a 24/7/365, microwave, get it done now, attention deficit culture, the stories of “straw, sticks, and bricks,” “a tree planted by streams of water,” building on “stone or sand,” sound

strange. And yet (as Bill preached last Sunday), **AND YET**, I think we know down deep in our souls that there is something more than the shallow, disposable ways of life. We know that there is something deep and true in planting a garden, in restoring a work of art for another 100 years and teaching a child to read for a lifetime. There are deeper things in life that stand in the winds of “big bad wolves,” truer things that remain standing after the storm. There are ways of life that really count: helping, caring, forgiving, hoping, loving. There are the ways of God and God’s kingdom, the ways of heaven, that happen here and now. And they are more than just good. I believe that they are eternal and everlasting.

A few weeks ago, I went to Boy Scout Troop 3’s Red and White Banquet. It’s an annual program and dinner that celebrates the Troop over the past year. And every year one thing always amazes me. On one hand you have the 11- and 12-year-old boys who are new to the Troop. They have a hard time sitting still for the brief program. And on the other hand, you have the older boys who have spent the last 5 or 6 years with Scouting. And those older boys used to be like the younger boys. But over the years, those older boys have learned and practiced The Boy Scout Law. They have learned and they practice being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, and cheerful. They have built character. They have become leaders.

And that’s really the point of Scouting, isn’t it? When the days in Scouting come to an end, those qualities don’t come to an end. Rather those young men carry those qualities forward to adult life; to school, jobs, marriage, raising a family, being part of a community. Their experience in Scouting prepares them for what comes next.

So I believe it is with Christian faith. Jesus has been raised, and so shall we be raised. It is the victory of God over death for us all. Therefore, the lives we build are not built in vain. Life, new life, eternal life, it all matters to God. And all that is good in our lives is somehow carried forward into eternal life. It doesn’t end. So, live like you’re “planting by streams of water,” and like you’re “building on the rock,” and like you are being transformed for the life to come. Because...well, you are. Amen.