

Third Sunday after Pentecost
Text: Matthew 7:21-29
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.
June 1, 2008

“I’ll Huff and I’ll Puff and I’ll...”

Once upon a time there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes. Before they left, their mother told them "Whatever you do , do it the best that you can because that's the way to get along in the world. The first little pig built his house out of straw because it was the easiest thing to do. The second little pig built his house out of sticks. This was a little bit stronger than a straw house. The third little pig built his house out of bricks. One night the big bad wolf, who dearly loved to eat fat little piggies, came along and saw the first little pig in his house of straw. He said "Let me in, Let me in, little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!" "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin", said the little pig. But of course the wolf did blow the house in and ate the first little pig.

Well - you know the rest of the story. The house of sticks didn't fare much better and the second little pig also became a pork dinner. Then there is the pig who took the time to do it right - built the house of bricks - and lived happily ever after.

The message from the Three Little Pigs story goes way back to Jesus' day. It seems like metaphors using the building of houses has a long standing tradition. Jesus uses it when he 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!"

Jesus used this illustration to end his famous Sermon on the Mount, telling people how to be assured of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. He simply says, "Do what I tell you! Hear my words and act on them." It's not enough to say we heard them. We need to act on them!

An elderly woman walked up to a little old man rocking in a chair on his porch. Though he looked weathered and feeble, he had a content smile on his face. "I couldn't help noticing how happy you look," she said. "What's your secret for a happy life?" "Well, I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day," he said, waving a wrinkled hand through the air, with a smoldering cigarette between his fingers. "I also drink a case of whiskey a week, eat fatty foods, and never exercise." "That's amazing!" said the woman. "So, how old are you?" "Twenty-six," he answered. Knowing what to do to live a healthy life is not the same as doing it!

What about having the perfect marriage? Couples stand in front of the altar and promise to Love and Cherish - Sick and Healthy - Rich or Poor - until Death do us part. They say it - but quickly realize it's tougher to do it! You may have heard about the woman who inserted an ad in the classified section of the paper. The Ad simply said: "Husband Wanted!" She received 200 letters answering her ad. They all said the same thing: "You can have mine."

Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

The teachings of Jesus are the foundation for a meaningful and satisfying life. Love for God, love for neighbor, love for yourself. Forgiveness, acceptance, humility, peace. It's a total package. Saying we are followers of Christ is one thing. Doing the things Christ asks us to do is something else. The sad thing is not that many of us are bad people. We aren't. The sad thing is that we are half-hearted about our faith.

Many people, even those who call themselves Christians, think it's a waste of time going to Church, reading the Bible, and saying Prayers. A young man named Gordon accepted the a new job. He learned that the job required CPR training. Reluctantly he signed up for a class offered by the local YMCA. Gordon felt a little uncomfortable in the class at first but decided to make the best of it. When things got a little boring, he entertained the class and irritated the instructor with a few jokes. Even though he didn't take the instruction seriously, he managed to pass the CPR exam. He became a certified lifesaver, though he had very little confidence in his ability to actually save someone's life.

A few weeks later Gordon was driving to work when he witnessed a traffic accident. He jumped out of his car to see if he could help. Someone yelled, "Does anybody here know CPR?" Nervously, Gordon answered, "I do!" and stepped to the front. There was a man on the ground who appeared to be unconscious. Gordon told someone to call 911 and quickly examined the victim. He checked to see if the man was breathing and found nothing. Gordon knew that he was supposed to administer quick breaths and force air into the man's lungs. But at that moment the reality of the situation hit him. What am I doing here? he wondered. I can't do this! I don't remember a thing from that silly CPR class! Gordon backed away for several seconds to collect his thoughts. That's when he noticed just how dirty and disgusting the man was. There's no way I can give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, Gordon decided.

Then the seriousness of the situation overtook him. The man was dying, and Gordon had to do something. Gordon knelt down, cupped his mouth over the man's mouth, and began giving him quick breaths. He checked for a pulse and found that the man's heart was beating. He checked for breathing. Still nothing. The man wasn't getting oxygen. Gordon gave him more quick, forceful breaths. Dozens of onlookers encouraged him. Some of them prayed. After what seemed like an eternity, the man on the ground finally started breathing on his own.

About that time, a team of paramedics arrived on the scene. The paramedics thanked Gordon and assured him that the man was going to live.

Gordon walked away from the incident feeling overwhelmed. Despite the fact that he'd felt completely inadequate and unprepared to save someone's life, he had actually done it. He thought of his CPR class and how he'd considered it a waste of time. As it turned out, Gordon was wrong about that. It was some of the most valuable time he ever spent.

Do you ever get the feeling that going to church, reading your Bible, and praying are complete wastes of time? Do those activities seem boring and irrelevant? Do you ever wonder how you can apply Christian teachings to your life? Gordon found himself prepared to save a man's life in spite of himself. That same type of surprise may happen to any one of us someday. Someday we might face an unexpected, stressful, and seemingly impossible situation. We may feel overwhelmed by the real challenges of life. But you'll be prepared in spite of yourself.

When Pig #1 and #2 built their houses, did they really think the Big Bad Wolf would come to huff and puff and blow their house down? If they had, they would have used Bricks! Hopefully none of us will have to face the Big Bad Wolves of life that will test our faith. But if we do, we're going to need a strong faith, the strongest faith possible. How do we build such a faith?! Jesus tells us in today's Gospel. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." Then whether it be the Big Bad Wolf - Sin - or the Devil himself. They can huff and puff and there is no way they can knock down our faith, because it's build on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. Amen