

We need Boundaries

Those of you who have taken the Alpha class with Pastor Wendy or myself have heard the presenter Nicky Gumbel talk about a soccer match that involved 22 eight year old boys. Nicky's son was playing in the match so the family went to see him play. However the referee did not show up for the game. The boys wanted to play anyway and Nicky was pressured into being the referee. But Nicky had a number of problems. He did not have a whistle, there were no marking for the boundaries of the field, he didn't know the names of the players and they did not have uniforms with numbers to distinguish who they were or what side they were on. And to top it off Nicky didn't know the rules for soccer very well. The game colapsed into complete chaos. Some of the boys shouted that the ball was out of bounds, some said it was in bounds. Some cried foul, others said no foul, Nicky didn't know what was right. So he let them play on. Then boys began to get hurt. And everybody was shouting. Finally the referee arrived and brought order. He blew his whistle, arranged the teams, told them where the boundaries were and had them in control. Nicky says after the referee arrived the boys had the game of their lives. Without any effective authority the boys were free to do exactly what they wanted. The result was that people were confused and hurt. They much preferred it when they knew where the boundaries were. Within those boundaries they were free to play and enjoy the game.

It is the rules and boundaries that make sports exciting. Take away the rules and boundaries and you have no game. Even so in the Christian life God's commandments are given for our own good. God gave us boundaries to keep us safe and remove confusion from our lives. Without rules and boundaries your life would be in constant chaos and all relationships would implode. Jesus said in John 8:31-32, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you

hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

What is a boundary? One description of a boundary is a legal description of property. A legal description gives the beginning and end. This past week I was looking at the boundaries of our church property. In the original deed the church received back in 1852 there is a legal description of our property. The legal description defines the property owned by the church. We are limited to build only on the land we own. To go beyond the boundaries would be to break the laws of the city and county.

But God has given everyone the freedom to choose. You can choose to stay within God’s boundaries or go outside God’s boundaries. It is possible to live without boundaries. The devil will try to fool you into thinking that living without boundaries is the way to freedom.

Breaking outside of boundaries can be dangerous. When I was a boy one of the sad times in my life was when our little dog, “Brandy ” got out our fenced back yard and ran out into the street and got run over by a car and died. The dog’s desire for freedom cost her her life.

Can you imagine what would have happened if the captain of the Titanic had said to the people when he knew the ship was sinking, “Everything on board this ship is free. Take whatever you want it is free.” The people would have said, “We are not looking for free stuff, we are interested in staying alive.” USA Today report: Research on the sinking of the Titanic has concluded that a series of slits, not a giant gash, sank the Titanic. The 900-foot cruise ship sank in 1912 on its first voyage, from England to New York. Fifteen hundred people died in the worst maritime disaster of the time. The most widely held theory is that the ship hit an iceberg, which opened a huge gash in the side of the liner. But an international team of divers and scientists used sound waves to probe through the wreckage, buried in mud two and a half miles deep in ocean water. Their discovery? The damage was surprisingly small. Instead of the huge gash, they found six relatively narrow slits across the six watertight holds. Small damage, below the water line and invisible to most, sank the Titanic.

It is often the little seeming insignificant things like small compromises, little white lies, and not telling the whole truth that erode away at a person's integrity and cause him/her to fall. Just like the small damage that sank the Titanic. In the search for freedom a person may reject God but in seeking freedom the person will end up in bondage.

Today our Gospel reading from Matthew chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus in Chapters 5-7. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly. 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Jesus makes it clear that true freedom does not come by turning away from the commandments and boundaries God has given. To say that you are free to do what you want to do with no regard for God's Word is the way to chaos not the way to freedom. Boundaries give freedom in relationships. In family relationships conflict and abuse often involve issues of control verses freedom. God designed the entire creation for freedom. We were not created to control each other we were created to love each other freely.

Boundaries give freedom. Boundaries also give security. Here in today's Gospel Jesus gives a parable of two men, one wise and one foolish that built their house. One built on solid rock and the other built on sand. The man who built on solid rock lived with security. Security is closely related to freedom. Each man had the freedom to build on whatever foundation he desired. When you build your life on Jesus you have a rock solid foundation to construct the rest of your life.

Romans 8:31 and following gives the Christian assurance that his life is in God's hand. "If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither

death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.

The people listening to Jesus' teaching, understood well the significance of building upon rock versus sand. But very few people in ancient Palestine wanted to live in the rocks. It meant grading the side of a slope and hauling up materials. Living in the hills made for more difficult travel. Water had to be toted and winter winds were colder. Most people followed the path of least resistance and built along the riverbeds. The scenery more pleasant, the water more conveniently located, and the house was sheltered from the cold winds of winter. And though flooding was a danger, most of the year the streams trickled pleasantly down the hillsides into the river nearby. But on rare occasions, perhaps only once a generation, the flood would come. There would be a combination of unusually heavy rains or, a torrential downpour. The result was a vicious flashflood, which swept away everything in its path.

Jesus is speaking of the absolute necessity of building your life on the right kind of foundation. Because the foundation is what holds everything up; it's what holds everything together. No matter what quality of materials you use; no matter how carefully you join the frame together; no matter how skilled your craftsmen may be – if the foundation isn't solid and stable, your "house" will lack integrity. Over time, cracks will develop in the walls. The windows will stick. The roof will leak. And sooner or later, the storms of life will bring it crashing down, and everything you've worked so hard to build will be lost.

Edwin Markham has written an appropriate little story called the Builder. You may have heard the story at one time or another. A certain rich man wanted to help someone. He saw the squalor in which a certain poor carpenter lived with his large family. The rich man sent for the carpenter and placed in his hands the blueprint for a nice home. He ordered that the house be made beautifully and sturdy, and that the best materials be used, regardless of the price. He further explained that he was going on an extended trip and wanted the house completed when

he returned.

Seeing the chance to make a huge profit, the carpenter skimped on materials, hired inexperienced workers at low wages, and covered mistakes with paint. When the rich man returned the carpenter handed him the keys to the house and told him that his instructions had been carried out to the letter. Good, replied the rich man as he returned the keys to him. For the house that you have been building is yours. You and your family are to live in it. In the years that followed, concluded Markham, the builder often regretted that he had cheated himself.

You and I are building houses with either good or shoddy material. We are building according to code or we are cutting corners. Jesus warned us to build our houses wisely; because the keys are going to be handed to us and we are going to have to live with what we have created.

Jesus gives us the choice where will be build our life. You can build on sand. Or you can choose to build your life on Christ the solid rock. You build on a solid foundation by, obeying the teachings of Christ. Paying attention to the building codes--praying regularly, Bible study, worship, small group fellowship and by, making choices that honor and please the Lord. **Amen**