

June 16, 2019 Like The Canadian Shield Pt. 1 Romans 1:24-2:1

There are certain portions of Christian teaching that are like the foundation of a house. The structure of the balance of Biblical teaching rests on these teachings as a platform, not unlike the footings of a house. When I was the minister of St. John's Presbyterian Church, in Kapuskasing, part of the assignment was to lead the congregation through a building program. The very small congregation in Kapuskasing had existed for 13 years, had in fact been served by two previous ministers. My assignment from the Mission Board at the time was to either build up the work or shut it down.

Not long after my arrival we found ourselves involved in building a church. The very first challenge we faced was the discovery that the building site The Presbyterian Church In Canada had purchased had liquid mud, two feet under the surface of the ground. The genius of the architect we hired was that he explained we needed to build above the surface of the ground and turn a saucer, into an inverted bowl. And the footings would have to be substantial, causing the church to float on this sea of liquid mud. The footings were in fact to be as wide as a local sidewalk...close to four and half feet. Those footings are one of the reasons the congregation still exists. The foundation was sound in a shifting precarious environment.

When I was a student at Knox College and Lakehead University before that, there was a famous Psychiatrist who was publishing books at the rate of about one every two years. He was critical of the churches in general, Christian teaching in particular for making people feel guilty...continually talking about sin. I believe I was serving in New Liskeard when I ran across his last book. The man was in his 80's. He had become concerned at the deterioration of time tested values, and morality in the western world. The title of the book was Whatever Became of Sin. He held the churches and Christianity in general responsible for not saying enough about mankind's capacity to do everything from pollute the environment to fouling our own nests, leading to a deterioration of family life and individual standards.

One is tempted to dismiss the man's work for wanting both sides of the street, as it were. But there is a point we must recognize. The lack of effective and meaningful teaching by the Church is part of the slide into the swamp when it comes to values and morality. We need to recognize that there is a reason the Biblical book of Genesis begins with the creation of life and then teaches us about the fall of mankind, humanity, into the state of sin and sinfulness. It is true that the Bible is unrelenting on this subject. Murder enters into the human story because of sin. Noah is a righteous man...no one lives by his standards...and yet when he has been preserved from the flood with his family and the species of animals

carried by the Ark, one of his first acts is a descent into sin that begins with alcohol.

My family has a tendency (for which I do not take all the credit) to reduce wisdom to short sentences. One of them is, "You can't fix stupid." What that means for us is that the sinfulness of mankind quite often has to do with doing things, and even making laws, that make it easier to destroy a healthy lifestyle than preserve it. The proposing of solutions that are not solutions to existing problems and that probably guarantee that current problems will multiply.

When we recognize the reality of the sinfulness of mankind, his and her tendency to be self destructive, we recognize the limitations of human ability. We arrive at the door at which our kind begin to recognize we need help. We need God's help specifically. Not that religion is man's savior, but rather that God alone is. We sing it, we read it, we testify to it, we make the attempt to adhere to this truth. Jesus saves. Jesus is entirely about saving us from the worst of our own nature. And the old Psychiatrist finally got it right. We need to recognize that sin is real. That sin is destructive. And we need to especially recognize we are never going to come up with a man centered programe, or system of laws, that will solve the problem of sin. It is like the Canadian Shield. You and I cannot fix, stupid. Sin is that commitment to lifestyle whereby rational, intelligent people including ourselves do things that lay the foundation for our own destruction.

As it says in Romans chapter 1, verse 25, what our kind has done, what people have tended to opt for is, “exchanging the truth of God for a lie, worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator.” Rather than God. This is not about subjecting ourselves to being ruled by the Church. This is not about saying people need to get “religion”. It is not about making a claim that people should go to church and all their problems would be solved. It is about the fundamental need of the human mind, soul and body to recognize that God is real and that HE cares about us, more than we do.

Remember that the divisions of this document called Romans into chapters and verses is not the way it was written. That system was introduced by the church to make it possible to study the Scriptures in bite sized portions. But in what we call chapter 3 Paul writes this: “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all!” And then in verse 10 he quotes from Psalm 54. He makes the point that there is truth in the Old Testament, that guards the truth he is teaching. “As it is written, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Paul includes himself in that sinful circle of humanity. And it is a drowning circle of humanity. A circle unable to save itself from the lethal nature of its own sin.

Over the next 7 weeks we are going to spend some time looking at some of the insights of Scripture which create those wide concrete footings such that we are able to stand in the midst of a sea of liquid mud. There is a reason that

in the field of Christian art, the church has often been portrayed as a ship, an ark, a means of deliverance by the grace of God, so that no fallen man might be able to boast. The Church is at her best, when she sticks to Biblical truth, and this present era is no exception, with its many challenges, and its many traps into which we are capable of falling.

At the conclusion of this morning's reading the apostle Paul wrote these words: "You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things." He is saying we are tempted, in our sin, into hypocrisy.

This series started out as a single message. The working title was "No Ifs, No buts, No Exceptions." And this is what that title means to me. We are all caught in the snare of sin. I am no better than any one else. And we are lost. I mean, totally lost; like being in the wilderness of North Ontario without a compass, far from any road. To say we are caught in sin, is the admission that we need help. God's help. The miracle of the cross of Jesus Christ. The wonder of new life, a new beginning, a do-over by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Faith in Jesus begins with the admission we are lost and helpless. In Tolkien's novels, *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo arrives at the moment when he says to Sam his best friend, "Sam, I can't do this." That is the moment when the

destruction of the ring of power becomes a possibility....He needed help. So do we.

Let us pray. The words of the prayer this morning are from hymn 316. It was Martin Luther who wrestled with his personal sense of there being no hope until he found texts in the letter to the Romans. Let us pray

A mighty fortress is our God/ A bulwark never
failing,/Protecting us with staff and rod/And power all
prevailing. /What if the nations rage and surging seas
rampage/what though the mountains fall?/ The Lord is God of
all:/ The Lord of hosts is with us. Amen