

ONE BRICK AT A TIME

When I first arrived at Saugatuck seven years ago the young people we have confirmed this morning were just little kids. They were seven or eight years old and still struggling with things like spelling and multiplication tables. They saw the first Harry Potter movie and laughed at the original *Shrek*. Mom or Dad was only paying \$1.46 a gallon for gas as they were shuttled around to soccer games and ballet lessons.

Here at church they got to play the roles of fat and skinny cows in the big kids' production of "Joseph and His Brothers" for Story Tent. And on Christmas Eve they were the cute little angels and shepherds at the Crib. Some of them sang in the Children's Choir—and all of them learned more about God and the Bible every week in Sunday School. They giggled at the puppets during the Children's Moment, squirmed in their seats waiting for communion and helped collect socks for rescue workers as part of our response to the events of 9/11.

Yes, they were just little kids back then. But a lot of important stuff was happening as they were being formed in faith here at Saugatuck. For right before our very eyes, one brick at a time, the foundation was being laid for the decisions they have made this morning.

Our scripture lesson today is all about the importance of foundations. It comes near the end of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's collection of some of Jesus' best known teachings. It is a parable, about two builders. One chooses to build his house on sand. The other on solid rock. Then the winds and rains come along—a cyclone, a hurricane, an earthquake—and the house built on sand is blown away. Completely destroyed. But the house erected on the rock remains standing. "Everyone who hears my words and acts on them," says Jesus, "will be like the man who built his house on a rock." (Matthew 7:24)

It doesn't even take a minute to tell the story. And it's pretty straightforward. Listen to my teachings, says Jesus, put them into action, and your life will have a solid foundation.

And so it will. But what the story doesn't reflect is the simple fact that building a foundation, building the house we call faith, takes a long time, and requires a good deal of help. And once the foundation is laid there is still much work that lies ahead. Indeed, it is a task that can last a lifetime and then some.

I think this class understands all that. Some of them are third generation here at Saugatuck. Devon told us he's "been coming to this church longer than [he] can remember." And so it is. When Craig and Betsy brought him forward for baptism, he was just a baby! They

understood—as did every parent represented by confirmands here this morning—that baptism is just the first brick in the foundation.

They also understood that it takes many bricklayers to lay the structure called faith. It takes other family members. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents: Caitlin thanked her older brother Chris: “You have taught me that even though life might be tough . . . just [keep] moving on and you’ll reach your dreams . . .”

It also takes church school teachers, mentors and pastors. “I’ve learned a lot over the course of our confirmation classes,” said Alexandra, “It has helped me understand what I believe.”

But most of all it takes you—the members of the congregation. For in your words, in your actions, in the way you live your lives, you are helping the children in our midst lay the foundation faith. “This is such a caring congregation,” said Helen, “I feel as though God is surrounding me in this building . . .” Or as Chloe said it: “. . . the people in this church help make these discoveries a fun and exciting thing to look forward to.” And so it should be!

The class also understands that it is a lifelong task, this bricklaying. “I hope you will accept me into the church,” said Margot, “to grow in the faith and in myself.”

Yesterday I saw a news report about the earthquake in China. One of the pictures shown in the story was of a school that had collapsed, killing many children. It was surrounded by other building that had remained standing. It turns out the school was built on sand, literally. Very poor quality concrete, and very little steel.

For each of our confirmands life will hold its own earthquakes. There will be events that shake up their lives in ways we cannot even begin to imagine. Sometimes, as Evba said, it will be like being in an episode of *Lost*. And as parents, as teachers, as a congregation, much as we would like to, we cannot stop such things from happening. But we can help them face such things by helping them lay a foundation of faith. We can share the teachings of Jesus, and help them learn how to put them into action. And with each lesson we teach, with each example we set we are doing just that. One brick at a time. In doing so we will help them endure the rumblings and ruptures of life.

We are so very proud of each one of you. Have no fear, we gladly accept you into the church! And we invite you to dip your trowels into the mortar and pick up the next brick as we continue, together, to lay down the foundation. For this building a house of faith, is indeed a lifetime process. For in the end, Chloe is right, “It’s never really over.”

Amen

John H. Danner

