

## Built on a Firm Foundation *Ephesians 2:11-22*

### Introduction

According to psychologist Lachlin Brown, the hardest question in the world to answer is this one:

Who am I?

He writes:

“Who am I?” is how we see and define ourselves. It creates our identity ... I am my name, I am my job, I am my relationships, I am my network, I am my affiliations, I am my hobbies.

These are all labels you could use to describe yourself. Even though many give clues and pointers to who you are, they're still limited. (Such labels) ... don't get to the heart of who you really are.

I agree with that. I am more than the labels in my life. Some of the labels give you a clear picture of a certain segment.

- When I say I am a husband, you know there a wife somewhere.
- When I say I am a pastor, there are images that surround that too.

When we were on our cruise earlier this month, in the early days our dinner companions would ask the standard question: “What do you do for a living?” When I would answer “I'm a pastor,” the conversation would get quiet. It created certain images in their minds ... images that clearly made them uncomfortable!

When I say “I am a Christian,” what does that mean? The spectrum of people who use that title varies so much that it is hard to form a consistent image, doesn't it?

This is the first of six sermons in a new series titled “Who Am I?” This series will attempt to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus.

If I claim to be a Christian, what does that mean? Who am I?

My goal is to let the Scriptures answer that question. Today we are drawn to these verses in the second reading:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.  
(Ephesians 2:19-20)

As a Christian, WHO AM I?

- I'm not an outsider. I belong here.



- I'm a citizen of God's kingdom and part of His family.

Those phrases are easy to grasp. But what does the text mean when it says that I am "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets?" Let me make three observations:

**OBSERVATION #1: RESIDENCY: A foundation suggests that you plan to stay**

A foundation is a place of permanency. It says to the world, "This is where I have chosen to live my life. Here on this foundation."

- It says, in the words of Martin Luther: "Here I stand."
- This is what I believe. The Christian faith and the words of the Bible define me.
- Like a foundation, they give direction to my life.

If you were not determined to stay somewhere, you would not pour a foundation. You would pitch a tent.

- Karen and I enjoy traveling. But we enjoy coming home ... to our permanent place. We could never be one of those couples who sells everything and moves into a motorhome to travel the country every day. God bless you if that lifestyle sounds exciting to you, but it's not me. We need a house with a foundation.

And in spiritual matters, my relationship with Jesus Christ gives me a foundation for my faith... something that is rock solid, something that never changes, a place where I can firmly stand.

- The text says it is the same faith as the apostles and prophets. It has lasted thousands of years. The same faith they proclaimed is the faith that undergirds me.

... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20)

Once a foundation is poured, the structure on it has a set shape. And our foundation was built on the teachings of the apostles and prophets with the life and mission of Jesus as the central focus – the cornerstone.

If you were to go to the "about us" table on our denominational website:

We are a church family committed to the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. In keeping with the Lutheran Confessions, we believe all doctrines should and must be judged by the teaching of Scripture. ([www.nalc-org/about-us](http://www.nalc-org/about-us))

Who am I? I am Christian who stands firmly on the Word of God as the foundation of my faith.

- Now, why is that important?

## **OBSERVATION #2: RESILIENCY: A foundation sustains you when the storms come**

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells a story about two homebuilders. One of them gave little thought to the foundation and built his home on the sand. The other made sure to build on the rock.

- Once they moved in, neither paid that much attention to the foundation. You don't usually think about your foundation when the weather is good.
- But then ... "the rains came down and the floods came up" ... and all of the sudden the importance of the foundation became clear.

It is the foundation that sustains you when the storms of life come.

- How often I hear a grieving family says "How do you get through something like this without faith in Jesus?"

There is a story about Michael Plant, who in 1992 began a solo crossing of the North Atlantic Ocean from the United States to France. When he left, his friends and family gathered at the dock to wish him well. It was a joyous sendoff. No one was worried about the trip because Michael was an expert.

- He had already circumnavigated the globe all alone more than once.
- He was considered to be the world best sailor.
- His sailboat was state-of-the-art, equipped with all the latest equipment and built with the finest materials.
- His radio system was capable of transmitting signals to satellites in case he would happen to get into trouble.

The prevailing assumption of Michael and all who knew him was that nothing could go wrong. But something did go wrong.

- Eleven days into the trip Michael encountered some very serious storms.
- Radio contact was lost
- But no one was worried. After all Michael was the world's best sailor and he had the world's finest equipment.

When the storms subsided, there was still no contact.

- Reconnaissance planes could not find him.
- Coast Guard ships searched without finding any trace.
- Several weeks passed before the sailboat was discovered, upside down.
- Michael was nowhere to be found.

Upside down? Sailboats don't capsize. Theoretically, sailboats are believed to be the most resilient sailing vessels. They can withstand any storm and will always right themselves even if temporarily pushed over. But not this time.

- No one knows for sure how it happened, but an 8,000 pound ballast that was supposed to have been bolted to the keel was missing.
- Whether it broke away in the storm, or there was some manufacturing defect ... no one knows.
- The ballast keeps the boat right-side up.

Be it a ballast or a foundation, when the storms come, you had better have one.

- If you don't know it already, you soon will: Storms happen.
- That ought to be a bumper sticker.

There is a tendency for us all to rely on the quality of our equipment or the other resources that we have, thinking those will get us through the storms of life.

- None of us are that resourceful.
- I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I love you too much to let you believe otherwise.
- You need a foundation. And you need it before ... "the rains come down and the floods come up."

Who am I? I am a Christian who can withstand the storms of life because I have foundation that is rock solid, built on the historic teaching of faith in Jesus Christ.

### **OBSERVATION #3: REPUTATION: A foundation speaks about your inner character**

For a period of my life I collected stories about stupid criminals – those people who so bungle what they are doing that you have to feel sorry for them. People like ...

A man from Colorado Springs who walked into a corner grocery store with a gun and demanded all the cash from register. After the cashier complied, the would-be thief noticed a bottle of scotch behind the counter. He demanded that as well. The cashier refused to give it to him, saying, "I can't give that to you. I don't believe you are over 21."

So at this point the robber took out his driver's license and gave it to the cashier, who promptly studied it, and then agreed that the thief was indeed over 21. He gave the man the scotch and the robber promptly left the store.

When he was gone, the cashier called the police, gave them the name and address of the robber, who was arrested two hours later.

Or people like ...

A man in San Francisco who went in to rob a branch of the Bank of America. He took one of the deposit slips and wrote "this iz a stickup. Put all your munny in this bag." Then he got in line, waiting for the next available teller. As he waited he started to worry that the bank cameras may have caught writing the note, so he left and went across the street to the Wells Fargo branch.

When the teller read the note with all of the spelling errors she surmised the robber may not be all that bright. She told him she could not accept the note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip. He would either need to re-write it or go back across the street. He said, "OK" and left.

She called the police, and they arrested him ... still standing in line at the Bank of America.

In that same illustration in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls the people who ignore the foundation “foolish.” Wise men build on a foundation; foolish people do not.

- As the Bible uses it, foolishness is a matter character.

Who am I? I am a Christian who has wisely built my life on the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ.

### **APPLICATION**

When the Apostle Paul wrote these words, he was sitting in a prison cell watching and listening as all kinds of religious heresies were taking root in Christian churches.

- To use the imagery of the text, Christians were starting to build on the sand not the rock.
- So Paul writes to say:

That's NOT who you are! You are a Christian, built on the foundation of the faith proclaimed by the apostles and prophets and shaped by the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Stand firm!

In our age, the call is the same. Where do you stand? What is your foundation? Who are you?

Amen.