

# "The Only Sure Foundation"

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

February 23,2014

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday After the Epiphany

A fascinating (although also devastating) phenomenon, which you see once in awhile on the television news, is a sinkhole. It seems to come out of nowhere. There's a nice piece of land. It can have a valuable house or, as the case a couple of weeks ago in Kentucky, a National Corvette Museum, on it. No matter how beautiful the land is and no matter how valuable the structure on the land is, the land just opens up and swallows everything on it. Information I found suggests that there's no way to predict a sinkhole before it happens, but, if it was possible, do you think anyone would build over a sinkhole, knowing that everything they build there would be destroyed? I don't think so.

Yet that's exactly what many people are doing these days on the giant sinkhole called the world. People build up for themselves belief systems, philosophies, religions, and even doctrines within Christianity which make them happy. People build up for themselves happiness rooted in sex, materialism, sports, technology, and many other things for the sole purpose of gaining pleasure. People establish priorities for themselves and their families in how they use their time, skills, and resources which only serve themselves.

It would be nice to think that no Christians are involved in this kind of building. The sad truth is that, because of our sinful human nature, we are tempted by the promises, possibilities, and priorities of this world. Whenever a pastor tries to warn people about the shortsightedness and danger of going along with the world on this, I sense people rolling their eyes and thinking, "There goes pastor again, off on a rant."

It's not easy trying to warn people about building up a huge and beautiful structure, namely, their lives, in this world. It's like trying to warn people about a coming sinkhole. Suppose I came to you and said, "You've got to move your house. I know there's a sinkhole under it which will open up

soon. You could lose all you have, even your lives.” Talk about eye-rolling! You would be thinking, “Everything looks just fine. My property is strong and secure.” You would probably politely listen to me, gently escort me out of your home, and immediately look for another church and pastor..

The same is true when warning about any spiritual sinkholes. People look at preachers like we are nuts. Despite all of the problems we have in life today, things are looking pretty good. Religion, as people understand and practice it, is serving them well. People have all the sports, sex, technology, and other sorts of pleasure that they could possibly use. Most people find ways to enjoy life for them and their families. What’s the big deal, preacher? Everything is going to be just fine.

Only everything ISN’T going to be just fine, despite how it may appear to you and me now. The Word of God is very clear about this. The world is one giant sinkhole which will eventually open up and swallow everything we have worked so hard to build on it. John says in his first letter, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires.” (1 John 2:15-17)

This “passing away” will come out of the blue – like a sinkhole, yet only faster and worse. Peter describes it in his second letter, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (2 Peter 3:10)

Just like you can’t predict a sinkhole, I don’t think you can prevent a sinkhole from coming. The only thing you can do is make sure that you build on solid ground so that you don’t lose everything. That may not even be possible. Yet it is exactly what Paul is promising in our epistle reading for today. He is promising a sure Foundation that will do more than simply protect our possessions and even our lives. It is a Foundation which will get us through anything and everything from now until eternity.

Paul, as a skilled master builder, had laid this Foundation in Corinth. He had preached and taught Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus IS that Foundation. The Church today has this Foundation for ourselves through the apostolic word. What exactly does it mean?

You don't have to be a pastor or a theologian to see what sin has done to this world. Sin's effects are quite clear. It has corrupted and destroyed (or will destroy) everything and everybody. Sin is the reason for the violence and hatred which we see in the world and experience in our own lives. Sin is the reason why we find ourselves suffering, sad, and unhappy. Sin is the reason we get sick, age, and die. And, most horribly, sin is the reason we are separated from God and all that is good. Sin is the reason the world is crumbling and falling apart.

The Church is a different place than the world in that the Church is not crumbling and falling apart. The Church has the Foundation which keeps us from crumbling and falling apart. As our Hymn of the Day said

*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord  
She is His new creation By water and the word  
From heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride  
With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died.*

Jesus came into this world falling apart from sin and bought a people to make His own, to support and keep safe from the effects of sin. He paid for us, His Church, with His own blood by which our sins are forgiven. He gained life everlasting for us by dying in our place. He rose from the dead to guarantee our glorious future. We have been brought into the Church, the new creation of Christ, by water and the Word in Holy Baptism. We are right with God through Jesus Christ. We are on a firm Foundation which will never let us down.

Now, it would be nice if we could look around and see that everything is just fine in the Church. That would give us some reassurance. The truth of the matter is that everything may look (and often does) very bleak. The hymn reinforces that understanding:

*Though with a scornful wonder The world sees her oppressed  
By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed*

*Through toil and tribulation And tumult of her war  
She waits the consummation Of peace forevermore.*

We see this. The world sees this. This is likely the reason why some leave the Church and others are not interested in the Church. It seems so unstable, like a sinkhole waiting to happen.

There will be a sudden change for the Church. Only it will not be a descent into a deep hole where we lose everything. It will be an ascent into everlasting life where we will gain more than we ever had here on earth and more than we could ever imagine. This is not wishful thinking, an uncertain hope, or a good possibility. We are not on a worldly sinkhole which teases us with temporary happiness. We are on the sure Foundation, Jesus Christ, who has already won for us eternal life on the cross; who already gave us that eternal life in our Baptisms; and who will bring us to the fulfillment of that eternal life when He comes again. It is a sure and certain thing!

So, where will you build your life and future – on the sinkhole of this world or on the sure Foundation of Jesus Christ? Do not let the world seduce or deceive you. It may appear to be just fine – for now. But the more you buy into the priorities, the passions, and the products of this world, the greater the crash will be when the world dissolves into one giant sinkhole. It doesn't matter how much you have attained here; how hard you have worked to establish your life here; or how good it all appears to be. It will all be gone.

Instead, build on THE one sure and lasting Foundation, Jesus Christ. Continuing on last week's theme about Paul, Apollos, and other pastors, this text is mostly about pastors, encouraging them to establish their ministry – their preaching, teaching, and pastoral care – only on Jesus Christ. In the fire of the coming Judgment Day, such work – the gold, silver, and precious stones – will endure. Yet even when there are flaws in doctrine and practice, that work – the wood, hay, and straw – will be destroyed, but the pastor, by God's grace and for the sake of Christ, will be still saved.

The same is true for people who are not pastors. Establish your life, your priorities, and your use of the things in this world only on Jesus Christ. When you use them to the glory of God and to

further the ministry of the Gospel, that work will endure in the fire of the coming Judgment Day. Yet even when use those things, at times, selfishly, improperly, or foolishly, those uses will be destroyed, but you, by God's grace and for the sake of Christ, will still be saved.

In the physical world, the truth is clear. If you build on land where a sinkhole will come, you will eventually lose everything, no matter how hard you've worked or how well you have built. If you build on a solid foundation, then, even if your work is not as good as it should be, you'll still be safe. The same is true in the spiritual world as well. If you establish your life solely on the sinkhole of this world, you will eventually lose everything, no matter what. If you establish your life solely on the foundation of Jesus Christ, then, even when you fail and screw up, that will be forgiven and you will be saved eternally, no matter what. Use and enjoy the things of this world as God would have you do. That is no sin. But establish your life and priorities on Jesus Christ alone and then, no matter what the future brings, you will be saved. Amen.