

## **“Standing in Sandy”**

Matthew 7:24-29

*Series: LAUNCH Week 7. Launched to Stand Firmly*

The Rev. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

November 11, 2012

We all saw her coming. Nobody invited her to our Halloween but she came anyway. Forecasters competed with each other to find the perfect name. They started with hurricane, then Superstorm, Frankenstorm, Bride of Frankenstorm. She certainly sounded like the script from a horror movie. As she tore through the Caribbean and came pounding up the east coast, all the models said she would be a meteorologist's worst nightmare – the collision of a hurricane from the east, a wintry storm from the west and a blast of arctic air from the north all under a full moon when the tides are highest. And she was heading straight for Atlantic City to clean out the casinos.

Superstorm Sandy was the largest Atlantic hurricane on record and second only to Hurricane Katrina on the list of costly hurricanes. Early estimates say she caused at least \$20 billion in damage. In the United States, 24 states endured the wrath of Sandy, from Florida to Maine and as far west as Michigan and Wisconsin. But New York and New Jersey faced the worst of her fury.

Millions of people in the Northeast were without power. The city that never sleeps went dark. Trees smashed homes and power lines. Barrier islands were no longer islands. 13 foot storm surges overwhelmed sea walls. Tunnels, highways and subways became seaways. Thousands of planes cancelled, lines at the gas pumps snaked for miles, schools and businesses all closed.

In the middle of all the insanity, people found a way to laugh at this Frankenstorm. They sent fake pictures on Twitter. One of them showed the Statue of Liberty about to be overwhelmed by a wave. Another showed her going down for the third time. One even pictured her cowering behind her pedestal.

Each of us probably has a Sandy story. When you are deprived of electricity, heat, light, hot showers, refrigeration, television and internet, you truly realize what means the most, what is most precious to you: coffee. I pulled out the camp stove brewed a pot on my front porch.

When you are down you also find out how many friends you have. Believe it or not, I received two emails from pastors saying, “We are praying for your distressed, suffering, struggling community.” Where were these pastors from? Mozambique and Haiti. The next thing you know they'll offer to send mission trips here next summer.

One question that was put to me again and again is: How do you stand in Sandy? How do you stand firm in the storm? And where is God in all this?

I think Jesus loved the beach. When you read the New Testament you find that Jesus hung a lot on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. He found his first disciples by the

shore. He taught his parables by the water. He threw a beach party for five thousand. I don't think they had a clambake but they did serve seafood. He even cooked breakfast for his followers on the shore. Jesus loved the beach.

But there is one thing He told us to never do: don't build your house on the sand: But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matthew 7:26-27).

We have seen the devastation caused by a wall of water. Two weeks ago it was Superstorm Sandy. Seven years ago Hurricane Katrina wiped out the gulf coast. FEMA declared it the "single most catastrophic natural disaster in U.S. history." The numbers are mind numbing: 90,000 square miles destroyed and 770,000 Americans displaced – more than the Dust Bowl migration of the Great Depression. Damage costs may be as high as \$125 billion. But, by far, the greatest cost was to human life – 1,836 in Louisiana alone. What Katrina did in just a few days is taking years to fully restore.

Six years ago, Yardley and all the Delaware Valley were overwhelmed by the third major flood in two years. Wallboard was ripped off studs and carpets off floors. Piles of water soaked possessions were placed on the curb. Sandy brought all those memories back again.

Storms splinter communities, smash homes and shatter lives. When Jesus said, "It's foolish to build your house on the sand," He wasn't against oceanfront real estate and He would never call the people of the Jersey Shore, the Gulf Coast or the Delaware Valley fools. He was concerned about the foundation of your life. It's foolish to build a house on sand *with no foundation*. Why? Because storms happen!

If you ask, "Why are there storms? Why is there suffering?" some religions answer, in essence, "It's your fault." Some religions say, "We believe in reincarnation. Yes, you are good now. But in a previous life you sinned and now you are paying for your sins." Other religions will say, "You sinned in this life and this is God's judgment on you." Others will say, "It's just blind fate or bad luck." Some scientists will say, "It's your fault because of global warming." Some philosophers say, "There is no meaning and no purpose. It's all random. We are just the victims of the forces of nature."

What does the New Testament say? Surprisingly, it does not try to explain why there is evil or disease, suffering or storms. It just accepts them as a reality, a fact. In this passage Jesus does not say the person who builds on the sand will be punished with a storm and the person who builds on the rock won't. The storm hits both of them. Jesus does not explain why some get hit by storms and some don't. Instead, He tells us what to do when the storm comes...because sooner or later it will.

So the question I want to ask you today my friends is: What is the foundation of your life? What is the foundation of your career? What is the foundation of your

marriage? What is the foundation of your family? I once received an email in which kids were asked questions about dating and marriage.

The first question they asked is **“How Do you Decide Who to Marry?”**

Alan, age 10, wrote, “You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming.”

Kristen, age 10 answered, “God decides (who you marry) way before you grow up and you get to find out later who you’re stuck with.

When asked, **“What Do Most People Do on a Date?”**

Martin, age 10, said, “On the first date, they just tell each other lies and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date.”

**What Would You Do on a First Date that was Turning Sour?”**

Craig, age 9, said, “I’d run home and play dead. The next day I would call all the newspapers and make sure they wrote about me in all the dead columns.

**How Can a Stranger Tell If Two People are Married?**

Derrick, age 8, replied, “You might have to guess, based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids.”

Finally, **How Would You Make a Marriage Work?**

Ricky, age 10, says, “Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a truck.

We laugh at these kids’ observations but they’re funny because they are partly true. Even in the best of marriages and families we tell lies, take each other for granted, yell and fight. In fact, over the twenty-six years I’ve been in the ministry I’ve seen a lot of homes built on shaky foundations.

- I don’t have a problem with alcohol. I just need a few more to help we unwind.
- I know I use drugs. So what? They stimulate my creativity and take the edge off.
- I’m just borrowing the money. I’ll pay it back before anyone in the company notices.
- Stop worrying. My spouse doesn’t have a clue about our little rendezvous.
- Listen, I know the debt is getting big. But I have another plan for handling it.
- Okay, I admit I work too much. I promise I’ll cut back after this next project.

Many of us build our lives on the foundation of our bank accounts and investments. We build on the foundation of Oprah, Dr. Phil and other pop gurus. We build on the foundation of our possessions, the foundation of pleasure, the foundation of popularity, the foundation of power.

But no foundation is strong enough to stand every storm. Two weeks ago the foundations of the Jersey shore were shaken. Six years ago the foundations and homes in

Yardley were flooded. Seven years ago the foundations in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast were devastated. Not long ago the United States was the undisputed Super Power of the World. The Cold War was over, the USSR was gone. Our economy was strong. Our military was the mightiest in the world. Our government was the leader of the free world. There were no enemies on the horizon. But on an incredibly beautiful Tuesday morning eleven years ago, our Pentagon took a direct hit. Our Capitol was almost destroyed and the Twin Towers were knocked down right to their foundation.

Dave Pettigrew, who will be coming to perform at Woodside next Saturday night, commemorated the tenth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> with a moving song called, "There's a Hope." His music reminds us,

Ten years later you are still the shelter from the storm  
You are still the rock that I have built this house upon  
Ten years later even though the tears still fall  
God you've held me through it all  
And I can still call on you.  
And you alone are the Savior of us all

But there's a hope  
There's a faith  
There's love for the whole human race  
There's a hope we receive  
It lets us hold on tight to all we believe  
Hope never quits  
Hope never dies  
Hope is still alive

So what is the one foundation which cannot be shaken? What is the only foundation that lasts in this life and for all eternity? What is the single strongest foundation on which to build your life? Jesus is the Rock of our Foundation. He said,

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock (Mathew 7:24-25).

When you listen to His Words in the Bible and put them into practice in your life, you build on a Rock solid foundation which no storm in two thousand years has been able to shake. Pleasure, popularity, possessions and powers have all come and gone. But still the Rock of Jesus stands.

After the April 2005 flood swept over Yardley, I went down to a ranch house along the river to help clean out the mud and water in the basement. To my utter amazement, one entire side of this house's foundation was completely knocked in. I could stand outside and look directly into the basement of the home of this dear elderly woman. For several hours we worked to pump out the water and sop up the mud. When it

was somewhat under control and I was about to leave, this kind lady stopped me for a minute. “I want to show you something,” she said. “After we cleaned out the debris I found this.” She showed me a large water soaked book – a Bible. The flood washed it in through the gaping hole in her foundation. Sooner or later, every foundation will be shaken. The only one which stands is the Word of God.

But we have to listen to God’s Word and live by it. Perhaps you don’t believe God exists. Maybe you’ve been turned off or hurt by the Church. It’s possible that you’re angry with God. Or perhaps you’re indifferent – you just don’t care. Maybe you call yourself a Christian, you even have a membership in a church, but you rarely worship with other believers, rarely read the Bible or do what it says. My friends, it doesn’t matter where you are or where you’ve been or what you’ve done. Today, you can come to Jesus and begin to build your life on His Solid Rock. He is calling to you. Listen to Him. Turn to Him.

And if you are a follower of Jesus then I hope you will take what you’ve learned over these last seven weeks from the Sermon on the Mount and from the Gospel of Matthew and start to put them to practice in your life.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.  
Pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”  
Serve God instead of money.  
Store up for yourself treasures in heaven that last for an eternity.  
Do not worry about your life...but seek first His kingdom and his righteousness.  
Be salt for the earth and light for the world.

That’s the way to build a foundation on the Rock of Jesus Christ that no storm in this world can shake.

Last week you took a stand in the midst of Sandy. One thing I learned from last Sunday is you have to be flexible. A couple of weeks before we left the building we learned that Lower Makefield was celebrating Veterans Day a week early and blocking Edgewood Road so we could not get to our parking lot. Even they wanted us to leave the building and not go back! I said, “Okay. We can handle that. We’ve done it before we can do it again.” The week before we left the building Superstorm Sandy struck. Many people were without power. Many of our partner churches had no electricity. A fellow pastor came and camped out here at Woodside to stay warm and use the internet. The Presbytery even moved a retreat here. One pastor said to me, “Our church has no power!” I replied, “You mean your building has no power.” “Yeah, that’s what I meant.” I encouraged the seventeen churches to go ahead and leave their buildings and view this crisis as an opportunity. Then, one day before we were to leave the building I learned Mitt Romney would be arriving down the street with 25,000 fans at the exact moment of our worship service. “Stay flexible or you’ll snap,” I told myself.

And then you all showed up Sunday morning. And in spite of not having any heat, hot water, refrigeration, television or the internet, you came to serve your neighbors.

**List of projects:**

6,000 rolled utensils for Trenton Area Soup Kitchen  
Thousands of books collected for Grover Washington Middle School  
40 people removing non-native plants from a neighborhood  
Canned goods collected from our neighbors  
Hurricane clean up in Ewing, Yardley and Levittown  
150+ meals prepared for Aid for Friends  
Adventure Club kids sang for Pickering Manor residents and then honored our Veterans in the parade which was also set up by Woodside workers  
NOVA Garden in Core Creek Park cleaned and restored  
Habitat for Humanity ReStore cleaned and organized  
22 dresses made and delivered to children in Haiti  
A worship service for women and children at the Salvation Army Shelter in Philly. 5 women gave their lives to Christ  
Sorting and organizing the thrift store at A Woman's Place  
A van full of furniture for Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission  
Worship for the residents of Manor Care  
A meal for family members of those awaiting transplants  
Helping single moms and elderly neighbors

Seven churches worshiped together, celebrated communion and ate 85 pizzas! That doesn't even include all that was done by the sixteen other churches. My brother, who lives in Neptune City next to Belmar, New Jersey came because he wanted to help others. We cleared trees from the lawns of the Thornridge section of Levittown. At first they were hesitant to accept our help. But then they said, "Okay." One homeowner came out later and said, "I have no words for this. I can't thank you enough." Another woman was in tears. A third said, "I have to write you a check." I said, "Please don't. We're doing this for free." "Please let me give you a donation." I said that was not necessary. She said, "C'mon. You never heard of a church that turned down a donation." So I took her check and passed it on to Urban Promise Trenton.

That night we gathered in the Vineyard. That night we weren't Presbyterians and Methodists and Lutherans and Catholics but one Body – the Body of Jesus Christ. We shared together the Lord's Supper. We praise the Rock of our Salvation. We stood tall even in the face of Superstorm, Frankenstorm Sandy. And when the people went home, full of the power of the Spirit, fireworks shot into the sky – even Mitt Romney wanted to celebrate. But the celebration was not for us. The glory goes to the only Rock that stands in the storm.

So when the next storm comes – where will you be standing?