

A solid place in shifting sand

A few years ago some friends and I went down to Parramatta Park for New Years' Eve. We were excited because we wanted to enjoy the bands, the atmosphere and were looking forward to the fireworks.

We found a good place to sit, high up on the hill and settled in for the evening. However, in the distance we could see some big black clouds headed our way. We hoped that they would pass by without causing any issues but it wasn't long before we could see some flashes of lightning and the clouds seemed to be coming closer.

When it was clear to us that the storm was headed our way and the lightning was going to be an issue we decided to leave the park, head home to safety. As we stood up to leave the announcements came over the speakers to say that the concert was being cancelled and the park was being evacuated and we were all to leave as quickly as possible to seek shelter.

Many people went to stand under trees but of course that is not a safe place to stand in an electric storm. We were safe and others were safe and although later that evening the park was reopened we chose to stay safe at a friends' house.

There are times in our lives when we can see some storms coming and we have time to prepare ourselves and make it to shelter. We can be safe and secure knowing that such storms will pass. There are other times in life when things happen that we didn't see coming, and we can find ourselves caught up in something which is challenging, frightening and even in places where we wonder if we will ever get through the circumstances.

Today we have two readings from the Bible which remind us that God is present to help us and protect us. That lovely children's song- 'the wise man built his house upon the rock' is fun to sing and brings back many memories for many of us- but it has a truth to it as it is based on something Jesus said.

If the foundations of our life are solid, if the values which we hold are about respect, love, justice and faith in God, then we can and do stand firm in the most difficult of circumstances. The reading also speaks about the foolish person who builds their house upon the sand.



I am reminded of the earthquake in Christchurch where countless thousands of houses were built on land which turned to something like mud. One of my brothers worked over there in the rebuilding and he told of how about 1/3 of the buildings in Christchurch could never be used again as their foundations were not solid enough. His job was to work as part of a team deciding which ones could survive and which ones needed to be condemned. It was all very sad.

We need to find the solid place in shifting sands for our lives- not just for our houses,

Societies that are built on power over people, where abuse and racism are accepted by the majority do not stand on solid foundations. To say that this land was devoid of people prior to a little over 200 years ago was a shaky basis to build our nation- and slowly we are trying to change that foundation so that the truth is not only told, but the foundations around that truth are rebuilt.

When we think of our congregation and the people God has called us to serve, we have people from many nations, both male and female, people with different abilities and each person is valued. The Matthew reading reminds us that it is not enough to believe in God- our actions need to live out that belief.

In the recent months of Covid 19 we have been facing a storm that is much greater than people ever imagined. Church and life are so different. Even with restrictions being lifted we cannot go back to 'normal' as the normal has changed.

We have also seen and heard about the protests called 'Black lives matter'. Some people are more focused on the fact that so many people were allowed to gather to protest. Yet for many people the protests are about the very foundations of our society where people are targeted because of their skin colour or the racial background and treated differently because of it.

Irrespective of whether we agree with the protests our faith in God reminds us that we are ALL made in the image of God and it is unjust to treat some people in ways which are less than they deserve just because of skin colour or racial profiling.

And this does happen in Australia still. One young woman and her mother came to the church one day. She had just had a baby who was in the children's hospital. The house was all set up for the baby to come home, they had everything they needed, money coming in, appropriate care etc. Yet the young woman was distressed as there were some extra precautions being taken about her being able to bring the baby home- simply because she was an aboriginal woman. She was an intelligent, lovely young woman clearly well supported by her mother with no obvious reasons to doubt their words.

I could tell many stories of the injustices done to people in Australia- simply because they are Aboriginal. These stories are not to convince anyone of the importance of this specific movement behind the protests but simply to remind us that the foundations of our society are NOT built on the solid foundation we would like it to be. Rather we are called to have foundations with respect for ALL people irrespective of difference.

As arguments and protests and unrest continues around the world we can be caught in feeling overwhelmed by the storms around us. As our country begins to rebuild and move to the recovery phase after those bushfires and Covid 19, we have opportunities to ensure our foundation in God is more solid.

The psalm reminds us that God is the one we can turn to.

¹¹*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Selah*

Let this be the foundation which we build our lives.

