

May 14, 2017, Hebrews 3:1-6, Patricia Weatherwax
Building a Home: Moses, Christ and Us (Mothers' Day)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house." ³ Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. ⁶ Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. (Hebrews 3:1-6)

Introduction

Who built your **house**? Do you know? Many of you probably say: "I haven't got a clue". Some of you might be able to answer that. Stetlers'? Rhoades'? Maybe you built it? My house is "manufactured" and was actually built in Indiana and *assembled* where I live now! So I really don't know how to answer that, either.

Who built your **home**? It's Mothers' Day and soon it will be Fathers' Day, the days when we consider our family structures and stories. As part of the family of God we are all brothers and sisters, and we chose to come to this place, sometimes called God's house: a holy space dedicated to worship and service. It's our family home.

I am aware that when we speak about our family home, I don't tend to think about the one I live in now. Rather the home, the one where my daughters were raised was what I think of as "their home". It's another family's home, now, although the kids only live there ½ of the time.

But, I kept the refrigerator magnet even after we moved out, the one that says: House Rules:

#1 Mom is always right.

#2 If Mom is wrong, see #1

That's power! I felt quite responsible for that home, and how my daughters turned out. Because I had power over the rules.

Voltaire, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Uncle Ben from Spiderman all in one form or another said: "With great power comes great responsibility". Building a home is a great responsibility. All of us are called to leadership and cooperation in our family homes AND in our church-family home. We believe that God calls men and women into leadership, and that all leaders serve and we are all here to serve. A=B and B=C, so A=C. We all lead as part of our calling. The text in Hebrews says it: "We are brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

Christian homes are asked to profess what Joshua exclaimed to God's people as they entered the Promised Land: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15). As families we decide that we model service. As individuals we define *how* we serve.

The Way Moses Built

Before Joshua, though, there was Moses. Our text in Hebrews reminds us that Moses remained “faithful” to his appointment (v 2). His appointment was to get the people out of slavery in Egypt and return them to their original land. Moses *helped* get that done. Doesn’t mean he was perfect, only that he tried to follow what he knew God leading him to do. Moses “was faithful in all God’s house” (v 5), with house again referring to the community of faith. This is noted, instruction from the Old Testament is for our benefit, as a reminder. It’s good for us to be faithful to God’s will for our homes, our social family and our spiritual family.

Moses was quite self-aware of how he would carry out his responsibilities, too. Some of the best instructive Old Testament stories about Moses involve his self-awareness at needing **help**. Mother, brother, sister, father-in-law, other Hebrew leaders and even some spies are part of the story of how Moses was “faithful in his appointment”. He built the family, and the house of God, around the structure of their society of rules and obligations, with lots of help and helpers.

And with lots of **rules** – there was good and the bad of that. Moses was the leader of the people of the law. He was responsible for bringing the 10 Commandments and other “rules” to the people. Issues developed because the spirit of the law usually was over-ruled by the letter of the law. The people ended up wanting a rule explained and delineated for every topic or possibility. They didn’t want to have to think or as I used to instruct my daughters, to use their “best judgment”. (I also remember asking if what they had done was *really* their *best* judgment!)

The Talmud explained the Torah in great detail. More difficulty came because the detailed rules were often unattainable by the average working family. The community leadership became built around those who had the ways and means to keep all the points of all the laws.

The Way Christ Builds

We consider verse 3 of Hebrews 3 a no-brainer, that Jesus is “worthy of more glory than Moses”. For those listening to this original sermon-- the letter to the Hebrews may well have started out as the manuscript or transcript of a sermon of early Christian theology-- when it was first presented, that was a new concept- Moses had been the prime religious historical authority. They had to *learn* to think first of what Christ taught, not what Moses and the laws had taught.

What theologians call “Christology”, the understanding of Jesus as fully human and fully divine and what that meant for a person, which was all a new concept to those first hearing this letter/sermon. Christ is worthy of glory, as part of God!

Worthy of glory: refers to God's greatness, honor, beauty, power, and light. In every case, the glory of God acknowledges the Lord's supreme strength and our need to acknowledge it and worship and serve because of it. Jesus deserves glory for being divine and also for being what our texts call “faithful as a son”. Obedient and willing. And superior to the way Moses built the people up.

Jesus was self-aware, too. He preached and taught and called people to identity as one who “followed”, just as he followed the will of the Father. While the Hebrew hierarchy was based on rules and lineage and geography, Jesus called us to know who we are, in light of our primarily being “children of God”. We are not grandchildren of God. You are a son or daughter. You are in relationship with God because of the love of Jesus. Jesus offered peaceful abundant life, without regard for gender, ethnicity, age, financial standing, or power.

One example of that “different way” is the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10: 25-37) that the youth so clearly demonstrated last Sunday. Being “religious” while averting your eyes and pretend you can’t see, or praying but not helping as you ignore the problems of others, following the purity rules and being part of the power elite, all of that is not as important as being kind and helpful. God’s family is built by Jesus love. A one hundred year-old hymn from my childhood that still didn’t make it into a Presbyterian hymn book, *Stepping in the Light* leads us as we are to:

*Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Trying to follow our Savior and King;
Shaping our lives by His blessed example...*

*How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Stepping in the light, stepping in the light,
How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Led in paths of light.*

Another obvious example of Jesus’ “different way” is the parable of the *Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32). Sometimes in our desire for fun and pleasure we forget that God has given us families as the best places to learn what’s most important. (And I understand that sometimes our families are not nurturing.) But Jesus, in the story of the wayward child explained God’s grace. Metaphorically Jesus taught, God wants us to come home, to be cleaned up and cared for. The lost child can come home. We can come home to God. We keep our egotistical pride and suffer or we can confess, apologize and come home to God. God’s family is built with grace, as offered by Jesus the Christ.

The Way we Build

We build, too. We can be resentful of the grace others receive, like the older brother in the parable, or we can rejoice when good triumphs over evil. God’s family is built with grace.

Hopefully we understand it is necessary to think positively, to build up rather than break down. One of my favorite apostolic charges is from the letter to the Philippians 4:8 (NRSV):

Beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

That's why we celebrate Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day- so we can reflect on the noble best attributes of those who tried and sometimes even succeeded in raising us to maturity, or at least to where we are now. We understand some homes have one parent and some have two or more. Many of us haven't had parents for quite a while. Some of you have never been and never will be parents, or aren't yet to that age and stage. We all have a heavenly father/mother loving God in heaven.

We are all called to be builders- strong on our foundation. We build on, as verse 6 says we "*hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.*" Are we still building, building ourselves with confidence, pride and hope? Are we building up others we know? The letter of Jude encourages us:

friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love. And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. (Jude 20-22)

You might know the Chicken Soup type story: "Nails In the Fence". The original author is unknown.

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there."

The little boy then understood how powerful his words were. He looked up at his father and said, "*I hope you can forgive me father for the holes I put in you.*"

"*Of course I can,*" said the father.

"Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." Hebrews 3:4 Build with your best efforts, like God, like Moses, like Jesus. Try to build without nails. In the name of the triune God. AMEN