

Planted on a Rock

June 26, 2005

Bible Passage: *Matthew 7:24-25 (CEV)*

At the end of last summer we went to visit Jenny's cousins who live just north of Chicago. They have a home that is only about a half mile from Lake Michigan. For the kids, one of the highlights of our visit is trekking down to the beach.

The walk down from the house to the beach is like something out of a fairytale. There is a single dirt path with a babbling brook next to it...the trail runs under a canopy of trees that block out most of the sunlight...it's kind of dark and mysterious...you begin to imagine you'll find breadcrumbs on the path that Hansel had left so he and Gretel could find their way back to the house.

Eventually you emerge onto the beach and are greeted with the sound of the surf crashing against an enormous rock retaining wall and the ocean-like expanse of Lake Michigan in front of you. It is a breath-taking view.

The first time we made this trip was 5 years ago. Our daughter Annie would have been 2 years old. Annie was fully upright and mobile by the time she was 9 months old, so by two, she was downright agile and nimble...not exactly a great combination for high waves, sharp rocks and an open beach. It was an all-out family effort to keep Annie off the rocks, out of the water, and out of harm's way.

However, on last year's visit I noticed a change in Annie and in us. At six years old Annie and her cousin Caroline were able to safely climb up on the huge rock retaining wall that stretches probably 100 feet out into Lake Michigan.

If you've ever been responsible for the well-being of a child in any capacity, you can imagine the overwhelming sense of fear that came over me when I glanced around and saw only the tops of two little heads waaaay out...seemingly in the middle of the lake. When I leapt to my feet to scream for Annie to "*come back here right now young lady...*" I noticed that Annie and her cousin were firmly planted on this huge bolder. The site of those two little girls with their hair softly blowing in the breeze, their hand placed confidently on their hips...well, it was one of life's little aha moments...for both Annie and for me. For Annie it was a huge growing moment...she had followed her older cousin out on to the rock, at first a little timid, but once she got out there and felt the security of the rock...realized that the rock was solid...realized that as long as she stood on that rock she was safe from the water and waves below.

As a father, I had to let go...I had to trust, and like Annie, I had to trust that as long as she was standing on that rock, she was okay.

The image of Annie and her cousin standing on that rock off the shore of Lake Michigan made me think about today's bible passage. The passage comes from Matthew, chapter 7, verses 24 and 25. These two verses come at the end of a Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

In that collection of sermons, Jesus outlines the type of community in which we are called to participate. Jesus called for his followers to be merciful, to love our enemies, to pray often, to treat others as we want to be treated, to give graciously...and to be doers of his word...in other words, Jesus was issuing a call to action. That is where our passage picks up with Jesus calling on his followers to act...Jesus said,

Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock.

Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash.

For me the Bible passage creates very vivid images...I can close my eyes and imagine the wind howling and waves crashing in against a light house in a terrible storm, but the lighthouse stands impervious to the storm...it stands firm and continues to send its life saving signal.

Last month I was out at the track for qualifications with some friends, and as is often the case, conversation eventually turned to the Green Bay Packers. Our friends are both from Wisconsin and are rabid Packers fans. In fact, they are one of over 110,000 proud Packers fans who own stock in the football team—you heard right, they own stock in the Green Bay Packers football team.

You may be saying to yourself...big deal, a lot of people own stock in a lot of things...but a football team? That's unique...unique indeed. The Green Bay Packers are the last and only professional sports team of any kind to be publicly owned. This unique community ownership has created a situation unparalleled in all of professional sports:

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- In a century of franchise movement, no other NFL team has held the same team name or stayed in the same location longer than Green Bay.
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- With season-ticket holders from all 50 states as well as Canada, Japan and Australia, the team's waiting list has more than 63,500 names (estimated 30-year wait).
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- And...The team has averted four financial collapses: 1921, 1922, 1934 and 1950. Each time the team was in trouble, the community stepped forward and invested in the team with the purchase of more stocks.
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Moreover, perhaps most intriguing of all is that owning stock in the Green Bay Packers really isn't worth much financially speaking. Shares of stock cannot be re-sold, except back to the team for a fraction of the original price, and no dividends are paid out on the stock.

They must put something in the cheese up there in Wisconsin! These people are investing their hard earned dollars to buy stock in a football team with no apparent financial value.

Now, I have to tell you...this frightens me a little because Emory Safford who sits on our Development Team owns a share of stock—[here it is...take a look](#). (*Slide of Packer Stock*) Did I mention that the Development Team makes the financial decisions around here! Nonetheless, maybe we could all take a lesson from folks like Emory and the Packers.

The packers have 9 playoff appearances in the last 11 years. They have more NFL titles than anyone with 12, and even in the 1970s and 80s when the team was not winning, the historic Lambeau field continued to be sold out; sold out with loyal fans known as cheese-heads who wear a synthetic block of cheese on their heads to show their affection for the team.

If you step away and look at the Packers from a distance you can clearly and vividly see an organization built on a rock.

Now, sound strange, but what if we created the same spirit for The Garden as the fans in Green Bay have

created for the packers. I mean, think how fun it would be on Sunday morning to wear a big hat that looks like a chunk of cheese. Instead of donuts and bagels, we could have brats and burgers. Instead of coffee and juice, we could have...well, maybe we better stick with coffee and juice.

Okay, so we aren't going to wear cheese hats. But, what if we *did* create *that kind* of community support for The Garden? What would that look like? I think it would look much like what the community Jesus implored his followers to create in the Sermon on the Mount—a community of caring and sharing. That's where I go back to our Bible passage for today. Investing in The Garden *is* creating that community...it is building the house on a rock—or in our case planting a garden on a rock—to ensure that it can weather any storm.

The Garden is only successful though when we are all in this together as one community. In order for The Garden to be planted on a rock, it requires every one of us working together like a Super Bowl championship team

So, what does building that kind of team require? What does investing in The Garden as a community mean? The most seemingly obvious is financial investment. While we don't sell stock in The Garden, we do put the watering cans out. Those watering cans are our lifeline. They allow us to be self-sustaining and provide the services and support necessary to exist as The Garden.

It is critical for us to have regular donations come in to ensure the smooth operation of The Garden. If you have the ability and financial wherewithal, I would encourage you to consider making that a regular part of your Garden experience.

Another opportunity exists to support The Garden financially. If you are someone who thinks in long-term planning, perhaps you would consider the possibility of helping fund The Garden endowment. The goal of the endowment is to create a source of revenue that will ensure the financial viability of The Garden for years to come. The immediate goal of the Endowment is to raise \$300,000.

As it stands we have about \$120,000 in pledges toward the \$300,000. However, matching funds of \$100,000 have been pledged when The Garden reaches the \$200,000 level. This opportunity will go a long way towards our long-term goal of financial stability.

If you would like more information about this vital aspect of The Garden ministry, Mike Hertel/ Marianne Glick who serve on The Garden Development Team will be available today after the service to answer any questions you might have.

[VIDEO: Forrest Gump \("and I gave Bibba's momma Bubba's half.of the money"\)](#)

As important to the success of The Garden is your time as a volunteer. We can not be The Garden without volunteers. All of the critical teams at The Garden are made up of volunteers. If you have a program handy, pick it up right now and browse through all the folks who are helping make today's service possible.

Our volunteers on all the various teams are the backbone of The Garden. Without these teams we couldn't run our services smoothly on Sunday morning...and without your volunteer support, we can't have these teams.

Again, I encourage you to consider this opportunity to be an integral part of The Garden. If you can invest your time in The Garden just one Sunday a month, you can help place The Garden upon a rock.

Yet another way you can invest in The Garden is through your prayers and presence. Prayer is the powerful connecting glue that keeps us bound to one another as a community. Just being here on Sunday morning is a powerful affirmation of your connection to this community, but keeping The Garden and all your Garden friends in your prayers throughout the week helps us all stay connected with one another.

Well, much like investing in the Green Bay Packers, your investment in The Garden will yield no obvious dividend. You won't get preference on season tickets or parking, but what we can offer you is the opportunity to be part of a loving community that

stands firm in the midst of life's winning and losing seasons. And...I suppose if you really want to wear the cheese hats, we could do that, but I'll leave that up to you.

Closing:

Vince Lombardi was the coach of the Green Bay Packers from 1959 to 1967. Under Lombardi Green Bay won 5 Super Bowl Championships. It was Lombardi's selfless outlook on football and life that won championships and help put the Packers on a rock...Lombardi said this:

Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

This morning as you leave, you will be given a rock to take with you. It is our prayer that this rock will be a tangible reminder of the community spirit of The Garden and your connection to it. Have a great Sunday; go in peace.

AMEN.