

## Tending Ancient Paths

### The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

#### Sand Castles

On one of the days our son Donovan and I were in Hawaii I had the thrill of watching my newly college minted son, who had just accepted a professional job from one of the top four accounting firms in the country, building a sand-castle - it was actually a sand community. It was our last day on the Big Island and we had been taking turns snorkeling and enjoying the beach together while we were awaiting sunset. As I came out of the water I found my 6.4 foot son building an epic sand-castle...all was going well until a big wave came in and washed away a bunch of the castle. So, we hurried to move the village further up the 'coast' to be free from the tsunami zone (of course, he was creating a story about the village as we built). As a Dad I was blessed to watch my son not take himself too seriously, he was simply enjoying the moments...but before it was over most of it became a victim of the tide. But isn't that what happens to most Sand-castles?



It's not near as much fun when we experience 'sand castles' that crash down around us. Jesus said it this way 'anyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who builds sand castles'....they will not stand. These are the words ringing in my head as I hear news of another ministry experiencing deep sorrow due to moral failure. Then these words rung in my head '*When will we take seriously Jesus call to stop building 'sand castles'?*' Here is the conclusion I am coming to today - these kind of failures are not just a missed step of an organization or dare I say even say the leader/s of an organization but something far more basic. **It is a failure of foundation.** When we build a life of faith around systems and structures that are anything less than a flourishing life of faith with and in Christ - it is a facade of sand that will almost certainly lead to a false life. **Jesus spoke regularly to the 'facade' of a religious life lived to impress others but disconnected from the foundation of real relationship.** To be clear most of us have had experience with building 'sand-castles' -that idea that we can earn, by our own merit or works, the acceptance and favor of God and with our heart disengaged from love. Jesus develops this further in the eight woes that follow Matthew 23:1-12. They can be summarized by saying you have missed that the law of God was never about impressing people with what you look or sound like, by **living a façade**, rather it is about you actually inhabiting a life built on the **unmovable foundation of the love and grace of God.**

**When Jesus speaks to the scribes and Pharisee's (some of the sand-castle builders of His day) He was calling them towards an actual life of human flourishing. And the person He is actually speaking to is me** and to every time I have chosen to put more confidence in what I know about God (cognitive certainty) and how well I think I have obeyed God (moral perfection) OVER actually living in and from His grace and love. In those moments— I am building a sand-castle. When I know the right thing to do but reserve the right not to do it, when I trust in formulas over formation, when I lack basic love for the people around me— these are all indications that I have been building sand-castles.

So how do we move from sand-castle construction to building a firm foundation of faith? It always begins with repentance. For years our best understanding of repentance was to stop doing bad stuff and hanging out with those who do! No wonder we have so many who see repentance in a negative light and believe that God only relates to humanity on the basis of our sin, brokenness and failure. **If this is our position we will almost always get repentance wrong because we translate it into a formula for 'being sorry' but don't actually deal with what we are believing about God and ourselves.** Beloved, the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus comes and inhabits the message He is declaring -God *wants* to relate to you on the basis of His love and we can build our life on that foundation!

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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

The path that brought actual life and restoration to humanity was Jesus coming to us and embracing all of humanities ugliness on a Cross. The Good News of the Gospel is that we don't have to impress anyone with how good we are at building anything! Jesus showed us that human lives can become actual human beings that can live in and from the love, grace, and mercies of God.

The one and only foundation that will stand is the place of living from the cross. Repentance is a turning away from anything less than that self giving, self emptying love and forgiveness revealed on the cross. We have all heard Satan's whispers inviting us to fear, anxiety, shame, and guilt based in what we have done or not done - you can be sure those are not the words of Jesus. The Gospel is based in what He has done! The next step of repentance is to let go of our inclination to impress God (and/or others) and come back to the reality of the Good News. He meets us in the mess, even the ones we are in right now. Our mind and body needs to be reminded of what is true...this is where the Practices of Prayer and Gratitude **become a part of our Repentance -inviting us to a flourishing life built on a solid foundation.**

This excerpt from Dianna Butler Bass in her book Grateful is fitting.

*A century ago, Albert Schweitzer, theologian and Nobel Peace Prize winner, remarked: **The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live. He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything.***

*He was right: to learn gratitude is to know the "mystery" of life. But he was also wrong in a very important way.*

*Every day there are reasons not to feel grateful and not to practice gratitude. Terrible, distressing, painful, and awful things happen all the time. The emotions of thanks elude us, and it is easy to choose ingratitude. Yet when I watch the news and fear grips my heart about whatever comes next, when a friend is diagnosed with cancer, or when a loved one dies, that Bible verse, the one Albert Schweitzer alluded to, the one I memorized as a teen-ager, calls toward a better way: "In everything give thanks." It does not say, as Schweitzer seems to have misquoted, "For everything give thanks."*

*Gratitude never calls us to give thanks for anything that is evil or unjust, never for violence, lying, oppression, or suffering. Do not be grateful for these things. The Greek word is en, which means "in, with, within, throughout." It locates us here and now, in the past, and in the future; in happiness, in despair; in all things, in all times, in all situations. Gratefulness grounds our lives in the world and with others, always locating the gifts and grace that accompany our way. Gratitude is an emotion. Gratitude is an ethical way of life. It is a disposition, an awareness, a set of habits. But ultimately, gratitude is a place — perhaps the place — where we find our truest and best selves.*

*To know the mystery of life is to be grateful in all things. In all things, with all things, through all things. I have discovered that I am no longer an ingrate, but I am living in gratitude. Sometimes the world turns on a preposition. To be grateful in these days is an act of resistance, of resilience, of renewal. My journey started because I did not know how to write thank-you notes. And it led me to understand that the politics of gratitude is a way of healing and compassion — perhaps even salvation. I invite you to the journey from ingratitude to gratefulness and to find yourself part of a like-spirited community. You are not alone. There are many on the road.*

With gratitude and integrity we steward your gifts. Thank you for partnering with the mission the Lord has given us in this hour as we partner with Him for His kingdom to expand.

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Ben and Denise, Please agree with us over these prayer needs for the next month...

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