

**“Bedrock Beliefs”**  
**Deuteronomy 32:1-7 & Matthew 7:24-29**

July 24, 2005

Sermon by Jan Edmiston

When we hear the word “Bedrock,” people of a certain age imagine a cartoon family called the Flintstones. Bedrock was the prehistoric hometown where the Flintstones enjoyed a stable, happy life, a town of 2500 people<sup>1</sup> where the men belonged to the Water Buffalo lodge and the women entered their cakes in the Tasty Pastry Contest. And all problems could be solved in less than 30 minutes.

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To a geologist, “bedrock” is something quite different. Deep beneath our soil lies the dense, consolidated rock known as bedrock. If you dig under any given location on the surface of this planet, eventually you will hit bedrock.

Bedrock has very few holes or cracks for water to penetrate. It is the most foundational point on the earth.

Now Jesus was a carpenter by trade and not a geologist, but he had surely seen with his human eyes what happens when a person builds a house on unconsolidated rock like gravel or sand. Jesus probably did not know that the land on which he walked was primarily a mixture of sandstone and limestone. Along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, the sand was filled with coquina shells and silt and ground up basalt.

Jesus probably did not know the soil content in his hometown of Nazareth, but he did know that a house built on solid rock would stand in stormy weather. And a house built on sand would not.

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This parable closes Jesus’ most famous sermon: The Sermon on the Mount.<sup>2</sup> While seminaries still teach a type of classical preaching that is supposed to include three points and a poem, Jesus – thankfully – was never trained in classical preaching. The Sermon on the Mount had at least 15 points and they include some of Jesus’ most famous words. For example, we find in this one sermon:

The Beatitudes: *Blessed are the peacemakers . . . Blessed are the merciful . . .*  
(and 7 additional blessings like this)

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<sup>1</sup> According to the opening credits of the show.

<sup>2</sup> The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel runs from chapter 5 through chapter 7.

Wise Sayings: *You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world. . .*  
(and similar proverbs)

Warnings: *Do not think I've come to abolish the law . . .*

Traditional beliefs turned on their heads: *You have heard it said that way, but I say this . . .* (There are 6 of these.)

Simple rules for practicing your faith: *don't show off when you give money, don't draw attention to yourself when you pray, don't listen to false prophets.*

It was during the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus introduced what we now call The Lord's Prayer, the *Our Father . . .*

And then he added more helpful spiritual hints: *Don't store up treasures on earth. Don't worry about tomorrow. Don't judge people.*

And on the positive side Jesus added: *Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.*

The Golden Rule was mentioned: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

And then there were more warnings, some of them dire.

And finally at the very end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not close with a poem. He concluded with a parable:

The Wise Man built his house on a rock. The Foolish Man built his house on sand. And when the floods came and when the wind blew, only one house would stand because it had a sturdy foundation.

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There is a lot of talk these days about the need for a sturdy (and clear) foundation in terms of philosophy and purpose. The term "core values" has been tossed around by religious, business, and military leaders for over a decade now.

Core values are our essential tenets— the most basic, foundational beliefs of an organization. I like the term "bedrock beliefs" - values so solid that you'll find very few holes or cracks for anything to penetrate. Bedrock beliefs are so sturdy, so far-reaching, that if you dig deeply enough in any spot, you will eventually hit a bedrock belief.

It is hoped that in this congregation, we would be so united in our core values, so unified in our bedrock beliefs, that if you dig deeply enough in any ministry, in any activity in the church, in any meeting, eventually you would hit a bedrock belief.

The tricky thing is this: I'm not sure we know what our bedrock beliefs are. They might be one thing for me, something else for you.

Life for us is not like it was for the Flintstones. In *their* Bedrock, everybody was the same color, everybody had the same kind of car (one of those foot-powered sedans), everybody enjoyed the same leisure activities (a night out at the drive-in for bronto-burgers).

But we are more of a blended nation today. I remember a teacher in the Arlington School system telling me years ago that memos to parents were not merely sent in multiple languages; they were sent in multiple alphabets. Grocery stores sell Mexican chipotle peppers and West Indian mangosteens alongside Idaho potatoes.

And we are more of a blended church too. We come from many countries or many parts of this country. Some of us grew up Presbyterian. Many of us did not. A few of us didn't even grow up Christian. While we might think we are all on the same page in terms of what we believe, if we get below the surface, we might find that we are very different. But in spite of our differences, the foundation of our faith needs to be as solid as a rock. This is my prayer.

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*The Harvard Business Review* claims that many companies are suffering today because their core values, their bedrock beliefs are not clear within their company.<sup>3</sup> Many churches are in the same trouble.

I know someone who joined a congregation in North Carolina that required all members – before they could join – to sign a statement promising never to vote for a pro-choice candidate in an election. Clearly one of their bedrock beliefs was to be pro-life, at least on the issue of abortion. (This is not something we could require, nor would we want to require it in this congregation, maybe because one of our unspoken core beliefs has been tolerance on hot issues.) But where does our tolerance end? It's an important question to ask.

While there was a time when homogenous congregations easily agreed on their most basic Christian values, we find ourselves today joined together as one congregation with dozens of perspectives on what is the most important value in this congregation.

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<sup>3</sup>“Building Your Company’s Vision” by James Collins and Jerry Porras, *Harvard Business Review*, September 1996.

If you asked someone from the Disney Corporation about Disney's core values, they would probably say something about wholesome, imaginative entertainment.

If we asked someone from Sony, they'd probably say something about being innovative technological pioneers.<sup>4</sup>

Of course most companies would say that they strive for "teamwork" and "good customer service" too, but those are not the core values that make those companies unique.

Most churches would say that they strive for "friendliness" and "a welcoming spirit" but those are not the deep bedrock beliefs that make us unique.

What is it then? What is the one thing we believe in that we cannot live without in this church? What are the things that – if they were missing – we could not continue to go on? What are the bedrock beliefs of this congregation?

This is something I want you to ponder and pray about and meditate on. If you are a member of this particular church, ask yourself:

***What does this congregation offer that we cannot live without?***

And if you are a visitor, I'd like you to ask yourself:

***What am I looking for in a spiritual community that I cannot live without?***

I want you to consider this as part of your devotional life this coming week.

Something exciting is happening in this place, in this community of faith. Your leaders have been working hard to look to the future and prayerfully discern where God is taking us. And in the coming months you will hear more about this.

But for now talk about this question with each other: what are our core values? What are our bedrock beliefs? What can we not live without as Christian people in this place, seeking God?

Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a bedrock *slide*. Bedrock doesn't slide. It doesn't shift with the times. It is ageless and eternal and holy.

Moses gives us clues in the ancient book of Deuteronomy to what it is that keeps people moving in the right direction. I don't know how many points my sermon has

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<sup>4</sup> "Back to the Beginning - Core Values" by Rick Sidorowicz, *The CEO Refresher*, 2000.

today, but we do have a poem – Moses’ poem about the history of God’s relationship with Israel.

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When people today hear about “the Rock” some people – of a certain age – imagine the actor who starred in *The Scorpion King*. He calls himself “The Rock.”

But when Moses spoke of the Rock, he was talking about God whose work is perfect and whose ways are just. This was the One they could hold onto. This was the Rock who sustained ancient Israel through its history. This was a God they could not live without (although they often tried with terrible results.) Such a foolish and senseless people.

What is it that we cannot live without in this church? Not the things we don’t *want* to live without, but the things we cannot live without? What is our Rock? What do we hold onto first and foremost? What is the foundation, the bedrock of our faith?

Is it merely the desire to be a friendly congregation?

Is it a specific organization within this place? A specific activity we hold up as more important to us than any other activity? A certain person?

We need to figure out what we really do hold onto as our rock, what we really want to hang onto. Is it God, or is it something else?

Are we building our house of worship, our spiritual home on the Rock of Ages? Or are we building our house on sand that shifts and erodes with time?

A new day is coming and our answer to these questions will determine how well we fare as storms threaten us and the wind blows. Moses knew it was important enough to say it one more time before he died. Jesus knew that it was important enough to say it at the end of his most important sermon:

God is our Rock. And unless we build our house on this Rock, we will sink. Our hope is built on nothing less.

Let us pray:

God our Rock and our Salvation. Focus our vision to be your vision for the the church and for world – where our greatest treasures are not made of gold, where our prayers are real and life-changing, where we understand what is holy and what is not. Holy God, give us such trust that we cling to you this week and always. Amen.

