

*“Lead Me to the Rock”*

Psalm 61 is a prayer for protection, which cries out to God, calling on God as a safe Refuge and Protector. Although it is a prayer of tears in the beginning, it concludes, as they often did, with praise to God. Please join me in prayer as I read Psalm 61, a prayer and praise to God.

***Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.***

***From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.***

***For Thou hast been a Shelter for me, and a Strong Tower from the enemy.***

***I will abide in Thy Tabernacle forever: I will trust in the Cover of Thy Wings.***

***For Thou, O God, hast heard my vows: Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy Name.***

***So will I sing praise unto Thy Name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows. Amen.***

Our spiritual path leads us toward a God that is “higher” than anything of this world. Too often we try to count on our own power and struggle when we realize that it is not enough to affect the kind of transformation we seek. How can we, as a church, keep leading each other on the spiritual path toward the God Who raises us up? The phrase, ***“lead me to the Rock that is higher”*** from Psalm 61 and the teaching of Jesus in the Reading from Matthew call us up to that Higher Rock – the Rock – the Foundation for our lives. What is that “higher” way? Certainly, it includes Trusting – Faithing in God and our Divine Parent’s Agape Love for us. Further, our Creator revealed this Rock Foundation through God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The Life, Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus provide us a compelling example for our New Life in Christ – this “higher” way – the life and Church built on the Rock.

Before we look closely at our Gospel Reading, it is helpful, perhaps, for us to review some biblical facts. The teaching of Jesus reported in this Scripture actually, has two versions. One is our Text from the Gospel of Matthew and the other is found in the Gospel of Luke. On the face of them, those two Scriptures are very much alike, however, there are some very significant differences. Before getting into those differences, it is important to understand both Matthew and Luke had a common written source for this teaching, which is lost. Matthew and Luke copied much of their material from the Gospel of Mark. Frequently, when Matthew and Luke basically agree with something different from Mark or not found in that gospel, its source is that lost written document. That other source is often referred to as the “Q” document by biblical scholars. A considerable amount of it can be recovered by compiling all the parts of Matthew and Luke, which are in basic agreement but are either not found in or different from the Gospel of Mark. Unfortunately, the “Q” document did not always provide the context for the Teachings of Jesus, which were included in it. With reference to Jesus’ teaching about building on the rock, instead of the sand, evidently, “Q” provided the context of it being part of what is commonly referred to as Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain as reported in Luke.

As I mentioned earlier, there are some significant differences between Matthew’s and Luke’s versions of this teaching. The author of Matthew, who was not Matthew the Tax Collector, often portrayed Jesus as teaching his followers should be better Pharisees – more faithful to the Jewish Law than that religious party. On the other hand, Luke portrayed Jesus as being in a conflict with the Pharisees and other legalists. The beginning of both versions of today’s Teaching illustrate the different approaches of the two gospel authors.

**Verses 24 and 26 from Matthew reported Jesus saying, “So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. ... But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”** Matthew said Jesus demanded people obey his words, as the Pharisees demanded everyone obey the commandments of the Jewish Law. It seems the focus of both Matthew and the Pharisees was on meeting the letter but not necessarily the meaning or purpose of Jesus’ Teachings or the Jewish Law.

On the other hand, Luke reported Jesus calling for everyone to fulfill the purpose of his Teachings – to put them into action or practice. **Luke 6:46-47 and 49 state Jesus said, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ... But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.”** Jesus called and calls everyone to put his Teachings – his Revelation

of the Rock Foundation for our New Life in Christ into action – “into practice”! It is clear to me, Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ Teaching on the Foundation is more authentic to Jesus and his meaning.

Jesus’ emphasis on our being lead to the Rock means we put the New Life he taught about into practice. The following story goes well with Jesus’ purpose for his Teaching in today’s Scripture. “In an earlier century, there lay a large boulder in the middle of the roadway. Traveler after traveler walked past the boulder, veering off the side of the road to get around it. All the while, they were shaking their head and muttering, ‘Can you believe that? Someone should get that big thing out of the way. What an inconvenience!’

Finally, a man came along and, seeing the boulder, took a branch from a tree and pried the boulder enough to get it rolling and rolled it off to the side of the road. Lying underneath the rock, he found a small bag with a note. The man picked up the note and read it. It read as follows:  
‘Thank you for being a true servant of the kingdom. Many have passed this way and complained because of the state of the problem and spoken of what ought to be done. But you have taken the responsibility upon yourself to serve the kingdom instead. You are the type of citizen we need more of in this kingdom. Please accept this bag of gold that traveler after traveler have walked by simply because they didn’t care enough about the kingdom to serve.’”  
(Greg Warren posted on Sermon Central) Jesus was telling us we are serving citizens of God’s Kingdom when we put the New Life in Christ into practice in our daily lives. **Indeed, our “bag of gold” is the New Life in Christ, sometimes referred to as the Life of the Kingdom of God or Eternal Life.** (PAUSE) Eternal Life is not just life after death (pause) because you fulfilled the requirement (pause) to believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Eternal Life is living as a Citizen of the Kingdom of God – the New Life in Christ!

If we look prior to the Scripture Readings for Jesus’ Teachings about building on a Rock Foundation in both Gospels, then, we find much of the content of the type of life we are to live, if we follow Jesus’ Way – his Teachings or Words. **Luke grouped many of those details of Jesus’ Teaching in Luke 6:27-36, when he reported Jesus taught, “But I tell you who hear me:**

***Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.***

***If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too;***

***if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well.***

***Give to everyone who asks you for something, and***

***when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back.***

***Do for others just what you want them to do for you.***

***If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them!***

***And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that!***

***And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount!***

***No! Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back.***

***You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God.***

***For He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked.***

***Be merciful just as your Father is Merciful.”***

The underlying theme to those aspects of the New Life in Christ is following his example of relating to people with agape – self-giving love. Whenever we interact with someone in our daily lives, we are to treat them with respect and agape love. Yes, the Rock, which is “higher” than ourselves – the Rock we are to build our lives upon is our Trust in God and Jesus Christ, as well as, our New Life in Christ – putting God’s Agape Love into practice! Agape Love is our guide and will show us the way to higher ground. Lead us to the Rock, Holy God. Amen.