

## **Message for July 12, 2020**

### **Matthew 7:21-27**

One of the most popular movie stars back in the days of the silent films and early talkies was Charlie Chaplin; indeed some people would even say that he is one of the most popular movie stars of all time as shown by the fact that to this very day many people still easily recognize him. Reflecting his popularity, at one time there were a lot of Charlie Chaplin contests too; people would compete trying to imitate him, much as some people today enter contests and try and imitate Elvis Presley.

As it happened, one day while Charlie Chaplin was on one of his tours, he ended up in a small town while the county fair was being held. The big attraction was a Charlie Chaplin contest and it was announced that the person who did the best imitation of him would win a cash prize of \$100; this of course was big money back in the days of the Depression. Chaplin didn't need or even want the money but he thought that it would be fun to enter the contest; why imagine the reaction when he won and they discovered that he, the real Charlie Chaplin, was there! When his turn came he sauntered out onto the stage with his trademark black bowler hat, baggy pants and rolled umbrella. He did a little routine and then went and joined the other eleven contestants to await the judges' decision. Chaplin of course was absolutely convinced that he had won; after all he was the real thing!

To his complete and utter shock though, Chaplin did not win; in fact he came in dead last! Poor Charlie Chaplin didn't know whether to laugh or cry. When shown the real thing the judges had opted in favour of the imitation and not just once either but eleven times! In a sense though, this true story is a parable about life itself. We certainly live in a world full of imitations. We eat food loaded with artificial or imitation flavours for example. We have imitation flowers both indoors and out. Many sports teams play on imitation grass or turf. Some people even have fake grass for their front lawns; this fake grass looks so green and lush in the summer but honestly, it looks downright weird in the winter! For one reason or

another, so often in life we settle for the imitation rather than the real thing but this isn't just true of our 'material' lives, it can and sometimes does carry over into our 'spiritual' lives as well. Indeed while we may not realize it, in today's scripture passage Jesus warned against settling for imitations.

Jesus was coming to the end of the Sermon on the Mount and he felt obliged to warn his listeners about true discipleship. In the years ahead many people will think that they are his disciples when in reality they aren't. On the Day of Judgement they will claim to be his followers but Jesus' response will be to say, "I never knew you, depart from me you evildoers!" But why will Jesus reject these people?

Simply because, all appearances aside, they really weren't his followers. To be sure they seemed to be the real thing but in reality? They were fakes. They didn't love God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength. They didn't really love or care about other people. All they cared about was their selves! Their discipleship was a sham, it was all fake or imitation and this has consequences for life here and now too.

Jesus said that if a person listens to what he says and acts upon it then he or she so-to-speak is like a person who builds their house on a rock; that person's faith is rock solid and is for real. This in turn will help them to weather the storms of life. If however a person just pays lip service to the teaching and example of Jesus, then they are like the person who builds his or her house on the sand. It may look good and may even appear to be rock solid but it isn't; it is a sham and at the first storm or crisis it will come tumbling down. It is vital then that we have a strong enduring faith but how do we go about achieving this? How do we make sure that we have a real faith and not some sort of imitation?

The first and perhaps the most obvious way is to take the time to worship God. A person once told me that he thought that worship was silly; imagine gathering week by week just to tell God how great and wonderful he is! What sort of god he asked, needs this constant reassurance that he is great? As I said to the person though, God doesn't need our praise or even our worship itself. Rather we worship God for our sake, not his.

Regular worship is our way of keeping in regular touch with God. Whether it be through the scriptures, the sermon, the anthem and the hymns, it is through worship that we grow in our knowledge of God and our relationship with him. The impact of worship is cumulative too.

Many years ago a debate was printed in a British magazine over the value of worship. One person wrote in to say that he thought that worship was a waste of time and that the clergy could find a better, more productive way to spend their time rather than preparing the services. Looking back at all the years he attended worship, he realized that virtually none of the services were particularly memorable. He concluded that his and the minister's time could have been better spent.

In response to this, another writer noted that he had been married for more than fifty years and that during that time his wife had prepared thousands of meals for him. Looking back, very few of those meals were particularly memorable but even so, as he pointed out, without them he would have starved to death years ago. So it is, he concluded, with worship. Its impact is cumulative and through it we both grow in our faith and deepen it. This however raises an important issue for us at the present time; how can we deepen and grow in our faith when we cannot gather together to worship?

The truth of course is that we can and should still worship, even if we cannot come together to do so. We can worship through watching a service on TV or on line. We can worship on our own through our prayers, reading the scripture and I hope, reading this message itself. What we must remember is that while worship is vital, it is still just a part of our acquiring a real faith; the books we read, the shows we watch and the music we listen to can all have an impact as well. In order to have a good strong faith we must, as Jesus said, be hearers of the Word and the Word can and does come to us in so many different ways. As Jesus also said though, it is not enough just to be *hearers* of the Word, we must be *doers* as well; as St. James famously wrote: "Faith by itself without works is dead." Truly it is not enough for us to just hear God's Word in whatever form it may come to

us, we must also strive to live it as well whether it be at church, at work, at play and everywhere else as well.

One day the great founder of Methodism, John Wesley, was asked to define discipleship; just what did it mean to be a doer of the Word? This was his reply:

“Do all the good you can by all the means you can in all the ways you can in all the places you can to all the people you can as long as you can.

Talk about a lot of content being packed into one sentence! This is however probably as full a description of being a disciple and living our faith as we will ever find. And if we strive to do this, then we will be doers as well as hearers of the Word. Indeed if we do this then we will have a real faith built on the rock, a faith that can and will withstand the storms of life, a faith that can and will offer security and shelter in times of trouble, grief, pain and uncertainty such as what we are now facing.

Do we want the real thing or are we prepared to settle for an imitation? Imitations have their place but not when it comes to religion and our relationship with God. If our faith is not for real, then it, like the fool's house built upon the sand, will collapse and fail us when we need it the most. And so the choice is ours; fake or real?