

29th May 2022

Isaiah 54, 10:

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

Dear friends

In preparing for confirmation I put a series of pictures before Lizzie and asked her to choose one which she would then receive as a present on this occasion. Her choice, however, had to be justified. She had to say why she chose what she did, what “message” the picture conveyed to her in terms of the faith and the truth of God’s Word we had been looking at over the past year. The picture she chose is one of mountains and hills, above them the sky and at the foot of them a number of buildings which include a church.

“Why this one?” I asked. It reminded her of the foundation that is God’s love and the need to build our lives upon this foundation, that is, upon the love of God.

What, indeed, is the foundation upon which we build our lives? And what is the foundation we can and must build upon if it is to yield life, and not the loss of it?

It is a great blessing to keep being reminded of this and to realise that the issue what foundation we build on is really a matter of the truth of our lives. For build we all do and do in any case: but it is the foundation you build on that

determines the goodness and truth of your build. Let us all remember this in the spirit of the words that wisdom says in Prov.8,17: *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.”* Pointing out that building our life on its true foundation is a life-long process and is indeed a love-affair.

When the people of Israel forsake their foundation, God in his address to them, they build what becomes their own destruction. It is always the result or consequence of forgetting God, a refusal to know him, loving what is not God as though it was (of loving what is not right as though it was, of loving what is false as though it was true).

In the story of the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life – surely the fullness of life that we all intend to build towards -, his foundation is revealed to be not the goodness and love of God, but the mixture of two things: of material possessions (wealth) and of his moral self (reputation and record). He turns away when Jesus points to a different foundation for building towards life – following him. He cannot countenance what Jesus proposes, because it empties him of what he has and of what he is as the foundation of his life and instead asks him to trust Christ as the foundation to build his life on – “follow me”.

Here we realise how little man changes and has changed through the centuries. Jesus said: *“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* (Lk.12,15) And here we are, being told loudly and persistently and from every corner

just about, to do precisely what Jesus warns against: we are told that to live is to consume and have much, that to live is to be much: much of what you can make of yourself; that to live is to have what you covet, and that your own goodness earns you life and heaven. The heart in Jesus' day was receptive to this message and needed warning, because it was building on wrong foundations and towards destruction. And is it not so now? Is not the foundation on which life is built today by many the search for material wellbeing and wealth and the search for the fulfilment of our own selves by ourselves?

Indeed, the pull is strong and the temptation real to believe this and fall in with this 'faith' – for that is what it is! – and to disbelieve Jesus' other word that belongs here: *“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* (Lk.9,25) And the strength that is exerted to keep us from realising that it doesn't profit and how it doesn't, is great and relentless. It needn't, however, achieve its goal, because the lack of profit manifests itself in manifold pains and sufferings that result from doing away with God, in worry and fear and loneliness in a cosmos that that does not speak, in the sense of being lost.

Yet here is another foundation, God has laid it and faith builds upon it. And what faith builds upon it is life, even life everlasting. This foundation makes the life that is built on it a thing of truth and love, because it imparts its own characteristics on to the build: It is the steadfast love of God (grace) and is the peace of God.

They are such as never to depart or be removed from those

whose faith rests upon them. Other foundations may seem as firm and set in place as mountains and hills, yet they are illusionary like the sand in Jesus' parable of the foolish builder, which allowed for a quick and impressive build, but not one that stood through the storm, the winds and rain, when it came.

What faith builds on *this* foundation? And to what faith are these words said: "*my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you*"? It is faith in Jesus Christ, for in him we encounter God's steadfast love, see and know the compassion of God towards sinners, going all the way in love and patience to reclaim those who believe from all the ways in which they build and have built their lives away from God, away from his love, light and truth, and to establish them on new ways, giving them freedom to do his will; in him we see and know the peace of God which removes from the scene that is our life all condemnation and separation from God that our sins and death incur.

Into this faith you have been baptised. Baptism says: The foundation is there, it is there before all else! Build upon it through Jesus Christ and in his strength, listening to his voice and sharing in the faith and life of his people (the fullness of his body). The foundation upon which by faith you stand will carry and hold you and sustain you. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your heart and your mind in Jesus Christ.

AMEN