

“Why Do You Call Him ‘Lord’?”

August 19, 2007

Dr. Kipp Wolfe

Luke 6:46-49

A few weeks ago when that bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, it brought back memories to many of us of another bridge collapse at Webbers Falls. It reminded us also of the uncertain nature of life. Sometimes the uncertainty is very serious. Sometimes it is not so serious, even amusing.

This past week I went down to visit my friend Dennis Clark at the Oklahoma Heart Hospital. You will remember he is the one that we mentioned, the minister at First Christian Church in Guthrie, who had open heart surgery a week ago this morning. I went down on Wednesday to visit Dennis. He is doing fine, has returned home. After we had visited, before I made the trip back, I stopped by one of the restrooms. When I walked into the restroom I was startled, to say the least. There was a person standing off to the side with a ponytail. Now, when you're a man and you walk into a restroom and you see someone with a ponytail, you have a moment of pause. Remember the commercial that has been airing for Southwest Airlines. There's a black woman at the airport, and she does walk into the men's restroom. This *was* a men's restroom. I checked outside the door after I left, and I got out as soon as I could.

Two or three weeks ago I was coming into the building's east entrance. Children from the Child Development Center were coming from the playground. It's not the first time a child has said this to a minister, in fact I've had children say it to me before. One of the children, as we were walking in, looked up at me and said, "Are you God?" A little girl corrected the boy immediately. She said, "Silly, that's not God, that's Jesus!" Not wanting to disappoint or confuse them, I just said, "Bless you," and moved on.

With all of the uncertainties in life, we do like to think we can get to the other side of a bridge without it collapsing, don't we? The events at Minneapolis reminded us that's not always so. What struck me so much about that tragedy in Minneapolis was this: do you remember what caused the bridge to collapse? Obviously, it was some kind of structural deficiency, but do you remember what was happening at the time of the collapse? There were workers on the bridge, but they were not repairing the structure, the support underneath the bridge. They were repaving the surface of that bridge. Think

about the irony of that. That seems to be a metaphor for much of what is wrong in our world. It is as if some people say, "You might be going to hell, but at least you'll have a smooth ride, and certainly you'll look good on the way down." My goodness, what a shame.

I came across a fascinating article in *Time Magazine* after the collapse of the bridge. It explains, at least in part, what happened. This writer said:

During the past 50 years, transportation has become a patronage program in this country. In the name of keeping the Federal Government small (and political risks low), Congress earmarks pet projects and then allows states to spend the remaining federal funds any way they like. Without real oversight or clear national goals, many local politicians opt for flashy projects that employ a lot of people instead of undertaking boring repairs that no one notices until disaster strikes. "Cities and states have been sinking millions of dollars into convention centers, stadiums - anything that shines," says Christopher Swope, an editor at *Governing Magazine*, who covers transportation. "At the same time, they're neglecting the stuff that's not so sexy. You don't have a groundbreaking ceremony when you do repair work on an old bridge."

It's easy to blame politicians, but how many of us do something similar in our own lives? How firm is your foundation of faith? Are you more a surface Christian who cares about what things look like to others? This scripture from Luke is unusual in the sense that it's a part of the lectionary cycle, but we don't usually read it once every three years because it falls on Transfiguration Sunday, and on Transfiguration Sunday most preachers preach on the Transfiguration, so this scripture is skipped. It is a part of what is known in Luke as Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. There is not a Sermon on the Mount in Luke's Gospel as there is in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew. Rather, it is a Sermon on the Plain. Before Jesus speaks to the people he comes down from the mountain and meets them on a level place. It's a nice touch in Luke's Gospel to show that God comes to us.

If ever any scripture were to speak to our generation, would not this be the scripture? We who care so much about surface issues and appearances - anything that is truly less than important.

Jesus gives an illustration, if you will, about a house that is built without a foundation. We are tempted to say, “Oh, come on, Jesus, everyone knows that a house needs a foundation. You can drive through any neighborhood and see houses being built and see the amount of time and effort that’s spent on the foundation.” Meanwhile, the living Christ says to us, however, “How is the foundation of your life?”

We live in a society of competing lords. Cynicism, pessimism, fear, doubt, despair – all of those things cause even a person of deep faith to wonder if things really might be hopeless. But one thing about serving the Christ who is Lord enables us to say is this: “Hopeless! We believe in the one who is the *Lord* of hope. Things are never hopeless. No situation or person is ever hopeless.” And yet, still those false lords compete with the one true Lord.

I wonder if the living Christ might say to us, “Instead of calling me ‘Lord,’ why don’t you call me ‘clown’ or ‘bodyguard’ or ‘errand boy’? That’s what you want from me. You want someone to entertain you. You want someone to protect you. You want someone who will do whatever you want.”

It is, I believe, perhaps the single most penetrating, disturbing, challenging question in all of the New Testament: “Why do you call me ‘Lord’?”

Why do you call Christ ‘Lord’? Some would say, “Well it’s just a habit. I was raised in the church. I’ve always called Christ ‘Lord.’” Others might say, “It’s good for business. Why, ever since we put that little fish on our advertising, our business has increased 25%.” Others might say, “Well, I want to hedge my bets. I don’t know if it’s really true or not, but I’m not going to take the risk. Why not go ahead and call him ‘Lord’?” Why do you call the living Christ ‘Lord’?

I came across a wonderful scripture from the Psalms recently. The psalmist said, “You are my Lord. Apart from you I have no good thing.” Think about what that means. Besides just the inevitable storms of life that we will all face, those tough times when we need some kind of foundation of faith, the psalmist seems to be saying that when we are in right relationship with God as the Lord of our lives even the good things of our lives are better. Our marriages, our families, our friendships, our relationships at work – all of those things seem to fall in line when we serve God as Lord.

How can we do this? It has something to do with Christ being the foundation of your life, Christ being the one who is at the very core of your values. This past week, watching some of the news accounts of the earthquake in

Peru, I was reminded of something I heard one time about the skyscrapers out in Los Angeles. In earthquake country when architects design tall skyscrapers, they do so with the thought in mind that one day the building might have to stand up to an earthquake. When they build the skyscraper they go deep down, as deep as they can, to the bedrock with these huge iron and steel pilings. There's one other thing they do. When they bury those pilings in the rock, they leave just a little space so the pilings can move, so the building can sway, almost imperceptibly, in an earthquake. In our faith that seems to say to me, "I don't have all of the answers. I need to leave a little room to be open to learn from other Christians, from the scripture, from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in my life."

One time President Lincoln and an aide had attended a worship service. They had sat in a special room off to the side. Lincoln did this so as to not attract attention to himself, partly for safety reasons, but also so he could slip out quietly toward the end of the service and avoid the crowd. As they were walking back to the White House, the aide asked Lincoln, "What did you think about the sermon, Mr. President?" Lincoln said, "It wasn't a good sermon." The aide said, "Why not?" Lincoln said, "It was well delivered, it was well thought out and well reasoned, but the minister didn't challenge us to do anything great for God."

Our challenge as followers of Christ is this: We are challenged to do what Christ tells us to do. Did you notice in the scripture Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord' and not do what I tell you to do?" In other words, there is a relationship between our love *for* Christ and our obedience *to* Christ.

We sing the hymn that says "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord." You are the church. You are the only church that some people will ever know. You're the only Bible that some people will ever know. You are the only Lord that some people will ever know.

It is one of my deep beliefs, as we consider what it means to live as persons of faith, that each of us, every day, must be ready when the living Christ asks us the question, "Why do you call me 'Lord'?" Amen