

When I was a kid I loved storms. We lived in a big, sturdy house; I felt very secure and like most children had no concept of mortality. **One of my most vivid memories is of April 3, 1974 when 148 tornadoes swept across the Midwest.** The tornadoes missed Danville, but of course we didn't know that then, and so my parents had us go to the basement and crouch in the coal room behind the furnace. **But I remember my brother Doug and I escaping and running upstairs to look out the parlor windows to the west, hoping to see a tornado, and being so disappointed when it didn't come.**

Of course, we were young, and as I said, had no sense of our own mortality. And we trusted that house. **It had thick walls and the brick footings and foundation went deep into the ground and we thought nothing could knock it down.** So we'd run upstairs, and my father would come up and drag us back down, up and down, up and down. He'd gone through a tornado and knew what it could do. But my brother and I hadn't, so we didn't fear it. **Now when I hear the siren go off in town, I tell Joan and the boys to go to the basement.** Sam grabs the guinea pig and heads downstairs, but Spencer wants to look out the window. So I have to take him by the hand. **I've lost my fascination for storms.**

Of course, there are all kinds of storms, some of which blow through our lives so forcefully not even the deepest basement can shelter us. **I was visiting with a man and woman the other day whose son had died five years ago and the wind is still kicking them around.** How do you ride out a storm like that? No basement deep enough for them.

One day Jesus was talking about houses and storms. He talked about houses built on rock and houses built on sand, and the floods and storms which assail them both. **This wasn't a lecture on architecture, he was simply using language and images people could understand.** What he was talking about was human frailty and vulnerability and mortality, and how the winds of life can blow hard and the waters of life can rise high and sweep us away. **We know this is true, because we've all had those times when our lives felt so ramschackle that even the smallest problem knocked us to the ground, when we were at risk of collapsing, when the ground underneath seemed to always be shifting, when it felt as if a hard wind would topple us over.**

A few weeks ago, a storm rolled through Roachdale and knocked down a big maple tree in my buddy Charlie's yard. **It was a huge, thick tree and if you ever thought a tree was impervious to storm, it would be that one, but the wind snapped it off level at the ground.**

It had been an impressive looking tree, but its roots were all rotted. **I kicked them with my foot and there was no muscle in them, just rot and decay.** The tree's size was inspiring, but there was nothing underneath holding it up.

Jesus said there are people like that, whose lives seem magnificent, whose faiths seem impressive, who like to remind others of their devotion, saying, "The Lord this...and the Lord that..." but underneath there's nothing holding them up. **As long as the wind never blows, they can hide it.** But the first hard wind comes along and it levels them. So Jesus said, "When you build your life, make sure you tie it to a solid foundation."

Luke believed that foundation was *obedience to the words and vision of Jesus*. Some folks hear the words of Jesus and say, "Yes, I believe that. That sounds like a nice way to live." **But other folks hear those same words and said, "I not only agree with the vision of Jesus, I'm going to live it out. It's going to become a way of life for me."** So the first folks are sympathetic listeners, they like the idea of it, and maybe even talk it up. But other folks hear it, draw it in, and build their lives on it. They not only agree with the vision, they obey it and live it out. **They exude kindness and mercy, they give of themselves, they pour out their lives.**

The thing is, at first glance, both groups look alike. A good actor can make sand look like stone. **In fact, sometimes the only way to tell them apart is when a storm hits their lives, then it becomes clear who built on sand and who built on stone, who is just an interested listener, and who is an obedient disciple.*** Because storms have a way of revealing who we are and what's at our core.

Last month, I was visiting Pauline Givan in the hospital. I'd gotten there early in the morning. Pauline had broken her hip and was in a great deal of pain. **I didn't want to wake her up, so I just sat beside her and looked at her and thought how difficult it is to grow old and have our bodies forsake us and how I hope I pass away before I ever have to experience that.** Natural thoughts to have. We all want to die in our beds of sudden heart attacks. But thinking like that, I got all depressed and discouraged. **Depressed for Pauline, and depressed for all the people in the hospital who were struggling.** Then after awhile Pauline woke up and took my hand and held it for the longest time. **She talked, very faintly, about her family and this meeting and the people in it and how blessed she felt.** She used the word *blessed* and that grabbed me. I sat there wondering where in the world that word came from, what sources deep within her gave birth to that word.

* The terms "interested listener" and "obedient disciple" are distinctions made by Fred Craddock in his *Interpreter's* commentary on Luke.

Well, I think it came out of her foundation. **This beautiful woman had spent her life digging deep and building on stone, so when the storms came through, she was still able to see the blessing.** And still able to bless. The funny thing is, I walked in that room thinking I was going to comfort her, thinking I would be strong for her, thinking I would help her. **And she was the one who helped me.**

Jesus said our reaction to difficulties reveals something about us. Some people sing about their firm foundations, but it turns out they were living on sand. **Some folks don't talk much about it, theirs is a quiet faith, but their roots grow deep.** So when the winds of life blow hard, they stand tall, and help others stand tall right alongside them.

