

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Dec 6th 2018

Foundations – many meanings in many contexts – foundational knowledge, or the foundation of a building, or a non-profit organization that does good works. A foundation is something that supports other things, usually structures. As a professor, it has been clear to me for decades that mastery of foundational knowledge is essential for students to prosper in higher-level courses. Clearly a building needs a foundation sufficient to support the structure that is inhabited. The Gates Foundation or Ford Foundation or Catholic Charities use their resources to do much good in supporting their communities.

As the message from Matthew reminds us, not every foundation is equally effective. Location is important, but also is the care that is taken to maintain the foundation. Conditions change, and what was a solid foundation fifty, or hundreds, or even thousands of years ago may have been weakened by external environmental factors and internal faults and degradation that have eroded its strength. A foundation set on rock will still fail if the mortar and nails and other fasteners that bind the foundation to the underlying structure weaken.

But foundations can be restored and their lives extended. St. Mary Magdalene church building in Omaha was only a few years old when the city decided to re-engineer the street on which it was located. The project would eventually lower the street over 20 feet. Rather than abandon the church, the parish decided to re-build its foundation to support the finished church – see photos here. For almost one hundred years the new foundation has supported a building that in turn is the gathering place for a vibrant downtown Omaha parish community.

The foundations of organizations can deteriorate as well, and it is the responsibility of all stakeholders in those organizations to take steps to strengthen the foundation so the organization can continue to thrive for the purposes for which it was formed. Those entrusted with management and oversight must discharge those duties, and if they do not, other stakeholders must hold them accountable to the extent possible. In Omaha several years ago a local non-profit was exposed in the news for paying very high salaries to the CEO and a few key officers while simultaneously reducing programs for the low-income people it was organized to serve. Public outcry led to reduced contributions, resignations, and the restructuring of the governing board. The foundation has since rebounded.

People have foundations also. Our family, our heritage, our culture, our faith traditions, our personal histories, all serve as the foundation for who we are and upon which we continue to build every day of our lives. Just as building engineers must constantly inspect the foundations of buildings to find structural issues, we must continually examine our foundations to discern if faults and flaws have appeared that must be addressed to prevent even more serious future issues.

Jesus reminds us that we must listen and then act on His words. By prayerfully contemplating His words, we better understand God's call to us. By acting on His words, we strengthen our foundation by deepening our personal commitment to His message of creating the kingdom of God on earth. By regularly examining our personal and organizational and other foundations, we can find those areas where we must make changes so our life-structures are stronger and more clearly focused on God's call.

And so my prayer today is for the grace to honestly examine my personal foundation and those of the

organizations in which I am a stakeholder, and for the strength to make the changes necessary to repair structural flaws that impede me, and those organizations, from generously responding to God's call.

Tom Purcell-Creighton University's Heider College of Business