

Advent Lutheran Church
Build Wisely
June 29, 2025
Matthew 7:24-27

Let me introduce you to someone I learned a great deal about this week: Claudette. At age 59, she's finding her way in life and doing so in a denomination in full communion with the ELCA.

For her story to make sense, I need to back up fifty plus years. One hot summer morning – perhaps a lot like this morning – 5-year-old Claudette was at her grandparents' house. Thanks to the miracle of television, she saw Audrey Hepburn playing the role of nun and decided that she wanted to become a nun when she grew up.

Of course, she was only 5 and was growing up in a Southern Baptist family. And, as a good Southern Baptist, she professed her faith and was baptized by immersion at the age of 8.

Rather than being deterred by her theologically conservative family, she pressed on. Claudette's single-minded focus led her to commit her first crime: stealing a library book. More specifically, she stole the book that the movie was based on and proceeded to read it over and over again.

The life she imagined for herself as a nun was radically different than her own life. Raised in a dysfunctional family her life was anything but stable. Her Dad was an addict. Her family struggled financially and moved often. Ultimately, her parents divorced.

When she was 15 her Mom married again and she began experiencing what she would realize years later was depression. Then, at age 17, she saw her first nun in real life.

I'd love to tell you that she made a smooth transition from her childhood to realize her calling as a nun, but that isn't how her story unfolded.

Instead, she did what most people do. She went on to college, started a career, and got married. Only after working for 20 years in the advertising industry and going through an ugly divorce did she really start to pursue her calling as a nun.

When she returned to serious consideration, she was discouraged because her views on several key social issues were contrary to those of the Catholic Church. Just as she felt her dream was impossible, she discovered the Episcopal Church – a progressive Protestant denomination with nuns.

Once she learned more and felt ready to proceed in her new tradition she encountered an unexpected financial hurdle that delayed her entry into the convent by several years. Before she could get started, she had to pay off all of what had become a rather considerable amount of personal debt.

Several years later she achieved her goal of becoming debt free. At the age of 46 she joined the Community of St. John the Baptist and began to feel at home in a way she had never known possible. Six years later, Sister Monica Clare made her final vows in 2018.¹

Sister Monica Clare's story is far more complex than the summary I've related. Nonetheless, it's clear she's built her entire life around her calling as a nun.

This morning, God isn't calling all of us to take a vow of poverty or to enter a religious order. God is, however, inviting us to build wisely on a firm foundation.

I imagine you've heard this morning's Gospel lesson before – the story of the wise and foolish builders. It is relatively simple to understand, yet challenging to live out.

You'll notice that both characters are builders. These are folks who do not simply know how to build, but rather people who

¹ Sister Monica Clare. *A Change of Habit: Leaving Behind My Husband, Career, and Everything I Owned to Become a Nun* (Crown, 2025).

proceed to put that knowledge into practice. With lots of hard work each of them builds a home.

What you might not realize hearing these verses in isolation is the larger context. These verses are the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount – the heart of Jesus’ teaching. It spans three full chapters – chapters five, six and seven.

Last summer I preached an unexpected message titled “The Best Sermon.” Rather than the normal 10-to-12-minute sermon you are accustomed to hearing, that morning I went on a bit longer so that I could recite the entire Sermon on the Mount. I wanted you to hear it in a single sitting.

Jesus used this sermon to teach all who seek to follow him how they should live. And, ever since he delivered it, those who seek to follow the Way of Jesus have looked to it for guidance. In a world of sandy foundations, Jesus presents a sure foundation; he is the rock upon which we are to build our lives.

The Sermon on the Mount teaches that we should choose to live differently from the world. We are invited to a life marked by

- Choosing humility rather than status or self-promotion
- Choosing peacemaking instead of winning or warring
- Choosing hunger for justice over satisfaction with privilege
- Choosing generosity in secret rather than charity for show
- Choosing love, always choosing love – even for our enemies

Many people can tell you all about what Jesus taught, but far fewer live it out. Knowing what is right is different from actively building what is right.

Mainline Protestants – the larger group the ELCA belongs to and a group that includes Episcopalians – are an intellectual crowd. Our traditions include members with higher educational levels than other Christian traditions. We do not ask people to check their brains at the door, but instead invite a robust intellectual approach to our faith.

We do not do this as a substitute for taking action, but rather as a supplement. And, we acknowledge that we are not saved by what we do, but by God's grace. This frees us to do as Jesus teaches not as a means of salvation, but as a response to it.

Most of you have known your identity since childhood. You are God's beloved children. I wonder how this has shaped you.

What has it meant for you to build your life upon the rock?

How has the Way of Jesus shaped who you are today?

How is your faith informing the person you are becoming?

Siblings in Christ, we have a firm foundation. We must continue to build upon it day by day. And, we must do this in our personal lives but also in our life together as a community of faith.

This morning marks the end of my first year as your interim pastor. Over the last 12 months we have learned much about one another, cared deeply for one another, and sought to listen and respond to God's Still Speaking Voice in our midst.

The clarity that is emerging about who Advent is enables progress toward the future God intends. And, it has helped the Call Committee in their discernment of who they believe to be the right person to serve as Advent's next settled pastor.

Remember Sister Monica Clare? She's still a nun and she's still growing and building. In fact, at age 59, she's now serving the sister superior at the convent. And, in the not-too-distant future, she will be ordained a priest. If her name sounds familiar, perhaps you are one of her more than 220,000 followers on TikTok.²

Thinking about the Gospel reading, there is one element I've not yet explored: storms.

² Sister Monica Clare is @nunsenseforthepeople on TikTok, www.tiktok.com/@nunsenseforthepeople?lang=en

I am not a spiritual meteorologist. I can't predict what storms may be coming or when they will arrive, but I'm certain they will impact you and me as well as whatever it is we are building.

May we be a people who build wisely.

Amen.