

Psalm 118:19-29; Mark 12:1-6

Rejected Stones

Sunday February 14th, 2016

It's terrible to be rejected. To be told in word, or attitude, or action that we're unacceptable, or unworthy, or unwanted. Has that happened to you? Were you ever been turned down by the college you wanted to attend? Have you ever been rejected for the job of your dreams? Were you ever turned down by that special boy or girl? I've experienced all these things. Have you? It's deeply hurtful to be rejected.

Now I have observed in life that rejection, like most tragedies in life, can propel us in one of two directions. Rejection can either develop resilience and determination in us, or it can make us bitter, angry and faithless. Rejection can lead us into being caring, sensitive, empathetic human beings, or it can lead us into being cold, judgmental and angry.

Dr. James Dobson the founder of Focus on the Family wrote about a man who was rejected in life. See if you can figure out who it is before the end of the story. Dr. Dobson wrote:

"His life began with all the classic handicaps and disadvantages. His mother had been married three times; his father died a few months before he was born. His mother gave him no affection, no love, no discipline, and no training in those early years.

She even forbade him to call her at work. Other children would have nothing to do with him. At the age of thirteen, a school psychologist commented that the boy probably didn't know the meaning of the word "love". During adolescence, the girls would have nothing to do with him and he fought with the boys.

As a young adult, he failed academically and then dropped out of high school. He joined the Marines but the other Marines laughed at him and ridiculed him. In time, he was court-martialed and thrown out of the military. When he eventually married, his wife belittled him, ridiculed his sexual impotence, and ultimately divorced him.

Finally, in silence, he pleaded no more. No one wanted him. No one had ever wanted him. He was perhaps the most rejected man of our time. Then, one day, he got up went to his garage and took down a rifle he had hidden there, and brought it to his newly-acquired job at a book storage building.

Shortly after noon on November 22, 1963, he sent two bullets crashing into the head of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. From Hide or Seek: How to Build Self-Esteem in Your Child, by Dr. James Dobson

The “most rejected man of our time” was of course, Lee Harvey Oswald.

In Old Testament times, like today in many parts of the world, the Jews were a rejected people. All the powerful and mighty nations of the world looked at them and laughed; they dismissed Israel as an unimportant and dishonored people. But God had a different idea. In the Psalm read today, God spoke of the Jews as stones...important stones. **“The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,” said the psalmist.**

In ancient times, in the time before laser beam levelers and electronic levelers,



the cornerstone was the most important stone in a building.



It was more than a place to put the date of the building on, or to place a time capsule in. It was the stone from which the entire rest of the building was built. It established the horizontal and vertical of the building. It made sure all the other stones were straight, level and secure. If the cornerstone was wrongly placed the entire structure would be off.

But God said that the people of Israel would be the entire world's cornerstone, that ultimately they would be powerful and respected and honored. Well they may have been God's chosen stones, but they were stones rejected by the rest of the world and sadly that's still the case today. Anti-Semitism is alive and flourishing.

When Jesus was telling his parable in today's Gospel lesson, he was speaking to those same Jews, the ones who were chosen by God; but rejected by the world. They were supposed to be cornerstones. They were supposed to be the moral, ethical and religious compass for humanity, but they became compromised on the way.

God had provided them with everything they needed to be content and happy in this world; their only responsibility was to be faithful and righteous. When God sent prophets and priests to remind the Jews of their responsibility, the Jews rejected them; they ridiculed them; and in some cases, they even killed the prophets.

And through this parable, Jesus suggests to the Jews that they would even kill God's Son if he were to come. Mark 12: 6-7 say, **"He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'"**

But Jesus became the Cornerstone. He is the most important stone in the Church and he was a Jew.



He sets the moral standard for us all and even the world. He alone holds the Church together as his Body. He is the foundation upon which the Kingdom of God rests. And he was rejected by his own people, the very people who were supposed to receive him.

Now the words of the psalmist have come full circle, when Jesus said in verses 10 and 11, **"The stone that the builders rejected has**

become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."

Actually, it doesn't come full circle until we realize that we too have rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives.

We can criticize the Jews, but we only do this to avoid and justify our own failings. We have not let Jesus set the moral and ethical standards for us; to be our cornerstone in all the circumstances of life. We most often say he is, but do people, does God see that in our lives?

Saint Augustine created what he referred to as the pyramid of priorities and each of us has one. Here is how it works: we list the six most important things in our life. Maybe they would be: **Family, job, God, money, reputation and health**. But when you are asked to take two away, say **reputation and money** and then **two more**; what do you have left? Augustine says that when you get down to that one final thing...that thing that you say is most valuable...that is the god of your life. That is the cornerstone.

You might say think we never get to really choose in life things like that but we do. Lent is a season, a time of self-reflection and challenge and we must realize we are faced with such choices on a daily basis. But we have become so accustomed to rationalizing and justifying our behavior, we don't see this as rejecting Jesus, as following another god. Most of the time the choices are subtle and not stark, but they are there.

This past year we saw 21 Coptic Christians beheaded in Libya for their Christian faith. These are 21 of 10s of 1000s of Christians tortured, murdered, raped and sold into slavery in the past 2 years in Iraqi and Syria. The 21 chose to live out their Christian faith to the end as true "martyrs." The word martyr means "witness"; a witness of faith in Jesus Christ to the end.

It means to use your death at the hands of others as a witness of your faith in Jesus Christ. Revelation 6:9 speaks of the souls of the Martyrs being kept under the throne of God until the Judgment Day where at this very moment they are crying out, "**How long O God!**"

In April of 1999, when I was doing youth ministry, an evil struck America in the form of a massacre at the hands of two boys at Columbine High school in Colorado. Two teenage boys--themselves also rejected by their peers--went on that evil rampage. One of the people they encountered in the library that afternoon was a young woman by the name of Cassie Burnall. With a gun pointed directly at her face, she was asked if she believed in God. She could have said, "No", and probably lived but she said, "Yes", and they killed her.

May God not test any of us in such a manner, but if he does, would you, would I, say, "Yes"?

But more importantly, do we practice saying "Yes" to God, to the Cornerstone, in the smaller dealings of our lives. Do you practice saying "Yes" to God in the everyday tests of life. Does "no evil come out of your mouth"? Do you build others up and not tear them down?

After worship today will you be kind and generous to waiters and waitresses? Will you be honest in your dealings with others, even the IRS during the tax season?

And maybe, most important of all, when speaking of accepting and rejecting today, will you accept the stranger in our midst, even the seemingly unloved and unlovely? Think of the tragedy that could have been avoided if Oswald or those two teenage boys would have been better accepted at some point in their lives.

We are in an area, a community where almost everybody is from someplace else. Daily, almost anywhere we go, we meet people who are new here who are looking to connect, who are looking for the fellowship and belonging that you've found. To accept and include is to say Yes to the Cornerstone.

And sometimes we run into youth who seem and act rather different.



Youth with tattoos, funny hair and clothes that actually scream, “Notice me”; acknowledge I am alive and even, please love me in my pain. Youth like this I’ve found are not as confident as they seem. Often they are insecure seeking to make a mark, any mark in a world they can’t connect to. With them we actually have a unique opportunity to invite them into a community more real, accepting and loving than they can imagine. It’s what we already have.

Today, like on Ash Wednesday you hold a stone. It’s actually a stone tile. This hard stone is a symbol of Christ as the cornerstone, the cornerstone of our lives. It also reminds us of the times that through our thoughts and actions we have rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives as we have rejected and ignored others.

Maybe you don’t need to lay this stone at the foot of the cross today as a confession of the times that through your thoughts and actions you have rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of your life.

Maybe you will take that stone home with you; because through your honest introspection, you believe that you have not rejected Jesus in your daily life. If this is the case then just take that stone home.

But I know what I must do. I will place this stone at the foot of the cross to request that God will forgive my sin and as an intention to lead a new life more closely following Jesus, the Cornerstone.

I invite you to come forward now and place your stone at the foot of the cross. Let it join the other stones from Ash Wednesday that represent our breaking our Covenant with God and God’s forgiveness of our sin. If you can’t come forward, place your stone in the offering plate in a moment and your stone will be placed at the foot of the cross for you.

Remember this promise from 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

May God forgive and cleanse us all. Amen.