

Christ, the Cornerstone

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” These are very familiar words to Christians. When we read these words, though, written in the Old Testament, we know they refer to Christ. But I sometimes wonder if we truly understand how they apply to Christ. If there is anyone here who does masonry work, you are probably more familiar than the rest of us with the importance of a cornerstone in construction. To help the rest of us understand I did a little research on what exactly a cornerstone is and does.

The first thing I learned was that in ancient times stones, especially large stones used in the erection of buildings, were extremely important. The Bible speaks often of stones being used to build altars or being set up as obelisks commemorating significant events in Jewish history.

A cornerstone was a special stone that set the stage, so to speak, for the success or failure of that building. Stones that had been weathered and tested were preferred over newly cut stones that could possibly fail and crumble under the weight of the structure they were meant to uphold.

Because there were no backhoes, bulldozers, and 12-story cranes in ancient times, the building was often constructed where the cornerstone was located.

During this Lenten season a thought has occurred to me about the times stones played a part in Jesus' story. Lent is usually started by retelling the story of Jesus, driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The first temptation was to turn stones to bread, which Jesus wisely did not do. Had he done so he would have betrayed his purpose in coming to earth. He was not here to see to his own needs; he was here to see to the needs of people who were fallen away from God. Sadly, many of these people were the ones already charged with being God's spokespersons – Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes and other learned men of the Sanhedrin. These were the same people who rejected Christ. So immersed in tradition they had lost sight of what they had originally been called to be – the shepherds of God's people.

Last week as we heard the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, once again stones were featured in the story. We heard Jesus' reply to the Pharisee's telling him to quiet his followers: "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:40) Even after three years of ministry, answering the many questions posed to him as a way to trap him, the Pharisees still could not see who Jesus was. They even went so far as to call him Beelzebub! Of course, Jesus had an answer to that as well.

Today's psalm, written hundreds of years before Christ walked the earth, tells his story. Although Jesus knew the Father and that the Father is eternally good, still Jesus went through testing. Forty days and nights

alone in a barren desert was a trial. All through his earthly ministry he was confronted and challenged by not only the religious leaders, but the people he knew best, those from his own hometown. Through these trials He was not broken.

Then we come to the events that lead us to Easter. Coming to Jerusalem, Jesus knew he would be put to death. And he knew it would not be a quick and painless death. Unlike his cousin John who was beheaded by Herod, Jesus would experience a slow and tortuous death on the cross. He knew he would be betrayed by one of his inner circle. He foretold the denial of the man he had named the Rock on which the church would be built. (There are those stones again!) He knew he would feel the full wrath of God, not for his own sins, but ours. Even given all of these awful events, Jesus did not crumble.

Like the psalmist, Jesus knew he would not be given over to death. His Father had a plan. The gates of heaven would be opened for him to enter into. As his life was leaving him on the cross, Jesus prayed “forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” With those words Jesus became our salvation. Knowing that whatever he asked in the Father’s name would be granted, Jesus saved us on that cross. God was his salvation and now Jesus is ours, our cornerstone. He is the strong rock on which the church stands today. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus was tested. He weathered the storms that came his way.

He was the stone meant to be a cornerstone, even if others did not see him that way.

There is one more stone for us to consider in Jesus' story. This morning, we remember a giant stone that was rolled away to reveal an empty tomb and the resurrection of the Cornerstone of our faith. And with the psalmist we "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." AMEN

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Benediction

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Lord, let that be us, your people.

You alone are God,

and have made your light shine on us.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

Go now in God's peace.