**“The Cornerstone”**

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Isaiah 51:1-7

Philippians 3:4b-14

**Matthew 21:33-46**

 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus said to them, “Have you **never read in Scriptures**: “’The **stone that the builders rejected** has **become The Cornerstone**; this was the **Lord’s doing**, and it is **marvelous in our eyes’**”.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bridge

From Psalm 118: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for **He** is good; for H**is steadfast love endures forever! Open to me** the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. **This** is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through **it**. I thank you that you have answered me and **have** **become my salvation**. The **stone that the builders rejected** **has become the cornerstone**. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; **let us rejoice and be glad in it.**”

A trivia question (for those of you with us at that time): as it’s been, now, just over 12 years since we dedicated this church **building** to the Lord, on what festival did we celebrate the **laying of its cornerstone**, and what was that day like? …… We came over from the house on 31 where we were worshiping after the last service on **Palm Sunday of April 17th, 2011**, and then it took us only 5 months beyond that to build and, then, consecrate the entire building from when we set that stone in place. God, then, let us to **move-in** to **live** **where The Cornerstone foundationed us**. Before that (and since) we’ve had the **cross on the hill**, under which we’ve known **the entire building enterprise**.

Of that day when we laid the cornerstone, we brought (remember, so many) markers and wrote Bible passages on all the 2 x 4 frames inside … in the **shell** of this building and its various rooms. Behind the wall next to, both, the pulpit and lectern, for instance, my (your pastor’s) confirmation verse of Psalm 27 is there for my constant remembrance: “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” Above the windows in the cry room, someone wrote: “and Jesus wept” … that was well done. Someone, also, wrote in the youth room: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Great stuff. What a wonderful memory … and to know that the **God’s specific Words** are embedded behind the walls that we see.

When you get a chance, go (yourselves) and look at that cornerstone. Know its **significance** as the analogy from today’s Gospel reading on Christ and His death for us. Cornerstones are set-where-they’re-set so as to make **everything connected from it straight and proper** / to **firm up a structure upon (and around) THAT FIXED POINT**, and **be, for it, FOCAL and FOUNDATIONAL for everything else that’s dedicated to it**. The **distinction** between, though, ours outside this building and the One identified in today’s reading is that the one outside **came looking like a choice stone**. It wasn’t cheap and it was meant to look (to human eyes) more special and precious … it would require no faith to stretch one’s imagination on its purpose and use. It was especially made and decorated (or adorned) to visibly **look** **impressive**. The Cornerstone it **represents** though (and all cornerstone that represent this), was, instead, a **“Stone rejected”**, not particularly of any **visible beauty** … not **comely**, but **common in “appearance”** … and, of course (because it’s the Gospel) One **cast-off and up above the ground of this earth on a cross of crucifixion to be removed beyond the natural respect of this world un-honored except for the most discerning and of repentance and faith for its need**. ……

Of all the things **planned** and **teachable** about **how this building was designed and built**, there’s been something **tremendous and** **surprisingly** **also instructive** about the v**iews out each bank of side windows in this sanctuary**. While everything **east and west** was planned, **north and south** has delivered its’ own significance. So, look out the **north** side (the hill side) and know and remember how wonderful it is to have that **rock-side of God’s Church**. **To engulf our entire view that way** is something **there since He created the earth**. **God made that hillside** on one of the six days that He made everything. What’s special about that is that One who is, Himself, the “**Rock of Ages**” gave us that fact and reminder of a **never-changing security in Him**.

And the view we have out of our **south** windows reminds us of just the opposite reality: things **temporary and changing-always about people … about, even, the fickleness of situations of us**. See, even where nature as in trees and grasses show outside those windows, those show to then die and give-way to other things. Houses (what we call, for a while, “homes”) get erected to, then, run their course and yield to newer constructions. The entire town of Spring Hill, etc., will change over time through seasons of development and construction and human enterprise. What **many consider their whole world**, this rock (outside the north window, if it was to think and speak) would maybe giggle at the change … or maybe **cry about it**.

God (the “Rock of our Salvation”) does think and speak … and what a **perspective** He must have of **our endeavors**.

**Text**

Jesus recounted a **history of those**. In this parable He told, He’s saying that **we** could be included in **Old Testament history**, not listening to His messages enough and tolerating neglect and even persecution. “There was a master of a house”, and **God** “who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it” (as in **His people / Israel or His Church** **as a vineyard**) “and dug a winepress in it” (**feeding it His Word and Sacrament / His Promises of Good**), “and built a tower” (**of ministry and preaching / His Word from prophets** “and leased (the whole thing) to tenants and went into another country”.

It’s like **us**-embedded-into-the-rock-of-this-ancient-hillside, **founded** **in a Good perspective and duty to the view of our north-side windows**. We’re **hedged in** / protected by the walls girding us with His Words that deliberately “**fence us”** **into the truths of God’s protection and security**. **Sanctuary** is, most certainly, what the vineyard of this room (a sanctuary) is meant to reflect, but dutybound to reflect that to the world at large.

God’s **made us to be His Holy people** … gathered as **His** people … granting us **space to find rest** **where He’s at “for us” according to promise** … and look out those north windows and **remember** **that He is with us as our stability and Rock and Stone of Foundation**. We’re reminded, out those windows, of the **Master next to His beloved vineyard** that Isaiah in His 5th chapter (then Jesus here in this parable) graphically depicts.

Yet Jesus’ story also reminds us of the **view out our south windows**. Vineyards are set aside for the purpose of **being a vineyard** as in **productive and bearing of fruits of the vine wherever God would have us live, and all of Spring Hill and beyond ought to be that.** Which is **the** **problem** of, even, our history … which is the **plight upon which our confessions and repentance finds a reason**.

“When the season for fruit drew near” as Jesus continues (and that season is, of course, **still with us** yet getting closer to a drop-dead, final harvest, date). “When the season for fruit drew near, He sent His servants to the tenants to **get His fruit**. And the tenants took His servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again He sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them” … rejecting or ignoring or “picking and choosing” and paying very little attention to most all of the Message.

 “**Finally**”, Jesus said, “**He sent His son to them**, saying, ‘They will respect My Son.’ But when the tenants saw the Son, they said to themselves, ‘This is The Heir. Come let us kill **Him** and **have His inheritance**.’ And **they took Him and threw Him out of the vineyard and killed Him**” … and would **our world** continue to **do the same?**

For us, we’ve dedicated a sanctuary aligned by the Cornerstone of Christ and Him crucified for us, because we needed that … and continue to need that “saving”. The thing that bridges the gap between our **north-side’s Rock wall expectation by the Timeless One** and the **south-side’s easily visible fallen nature** is the One who came **to be “rejected”, so nailed to a cross for our sake**. And it’s our job (as current “tenants” of that trust) to **maintain that truth faithfully and proclaim it out our south windows energetically and boldly**.

The apostle Paul considered his need and focus this way: “if anyone else thinks he has reason for **confidence in the flesh**, I have more.” Paul was a **superstar of earthly (south side window) success**: Ph. D. educated bishop’s bishop, honor student who’d climbed earthly corporate ladders, V. P. beyond V.P.’s perhaps. But, humbled and changed, he’d likely looked out our south-side window and wonder what **our world is chasing that he found ultimately useless**: investing in humanly-built houses that God’s eternal one would dwarf. He’d wonder why we engage ourselves in works of energy acquiring money and things and recreational options ever bigger and seemingly better.

**He'd had it all, Paul did**. We see him, mostly on this side of God’s calling simple and even given-over to hardship, prison, and finally execution, but before that he, himself, championed every false pursuit known mankind knew. “Whatever gain I **had**”, he here says, “**I count as loss now for the sake of Christ**. Indeed, I count **everything as loss** **because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and **count THEM as rubbish** in order that I may **gain CHRIST and be found IN HIM**, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law**, but **that which comes THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, the righteousness from God that depends on faith**—that I may **know Him and the power of His resurrection**, and may **share His sufferings**, **becoming** **like Him in His death**, **that by any means possible I may ATTAIN the resurrection from the dead**.” ….

Application

I have this feeling that Paul would enjoy our view out our **north-side windows … probably having a similar FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE HIMSELF**. But his look out our south windows would remind him of his own **previous futility** and this world’s **futility who clings to a wasted hope apart from salvation**. I know Paul would gain comfort from the rock wall’s God-created stability that would remind him about the **foundational Cornerstone of “Christ and Him crucified / the “stone rejected”** **but made the Cornerstone proclaimed by the cross ON that rock wall come to be so-rejected for him**. Paul would appreciate the reminder of it and Jesus **“despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, wounded for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities; the Lord having laid on Him the iniquity of us all**.”

And, from that, Paul would **embrace duty as he did** … duty depicted by the other side of our sanctuary’s view. Despairing of those focused on personal desires, Paul would “**share in Christ’s sufferings” by all means by going from here to there to bring a “resurrection from the dead” to anyone who, without Christ, might be only facing death and it potentially eternal**.

And this is where Jesus’ parable here is just a further answer to last week’s question of “**Who are You” in this world?** May **the Rock of our salvation be, for us, foundational and motivating**. May what we would ever consider of **“surpassing worth**” to us make of us, then, **vines in His vineyard that God strews plentiful in fruit**. “The stone that the builders rejected **has become the cornerstone**. So may this, for us, always be “**marvelous in our eyes**” … also momentum for our movements.

In +Jesus’ name. Amen.