

AN UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE – LUKE 20:9-19

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ MARCH 22, 2015

⁹ He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. ¹⁰ At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. ¹² He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. ¹³ “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴ “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!” ¹⁷ Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” ¹⁹ The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

This weekend marks the first weekend of the NCAA Division 1 basketball tournament, otherwise known as March Madness. For many viewers, this is the only time of the year they watch college basketball. There’s something about a tournament style that keeps fans on the edge of their seats. One bad game or one lucky shot and your team could be going home. Another reason March Madness appeals to the casual fan is the upsets. Each team is seeded, and the greater the upset, the greater the excitement. The underdogs aren’t supposed to win, but we all root for it. The lower seeded teams advancing in the tournament are unlikely but watched for events.

Especially when it’s not our team being upset, we’re fine rooting for the “David’s” rather than the “Goliath’s.” We don’t just see that in sports, but we see that in life as well. Many people would rather spend their money at a local restaurant than at a national chain. But I wonder how you would classify Jesus – would he be the favorite or the upset pick? While I think that many of us would pick Jesus as the favorite (and rightly so) but we shouldn’t forget he also talks about himself as one who is rejected, the “underdog” if you will. This morning in our journey of stones we take a look at one of the paradoxes that is our Savior – how he is at the same time both the favorite, and the upset. He calls himself THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE.

1. He is not of the world
2. But he is for the world

You can tell that we are getting closer and closer to Easter. It's almost as if the religious leaders can tell something important is coming as well, their attacks were growing in strength as they sought to get rid of Jesus. This gospel account before us this morning took place during Holy Week, on teaching Tuesday. And like only Jesus could, he tells a parable. But Jesus' parables were not just stories he told to get a laugh. But they are stories which taught the people, and sometimes, like in this case, warned the people as well. With a parable, Jesus could let the religious leaders know that he knows exactly what is going on in their minds, and he gives the warning of what will happen if they go through with their evil plot.

This was the parable of a man who planted a vineyard. Right in line with Middle Eastern custom, he rented the vineyard out to some farmers while he went away. His payment would be a portion of the crops those farmers harvested. The owner showed incredible patience with the farmers, allowing the vineyard ample time to produce fruit. But when it came time to collect on his rent, he found it rather difficult.

For whatever reason, the owner had not selected very good renters. Instead of paying him what was due, they flogged the first servant, they shamed the second, and they wounded the third. With each of the servants the owner sent, the farmers become ever more bold with their refusal to pay their rent. Yet the fact that the owner sent the second and third servant after he heard the treatment of the first is a testament to his patience. But then the owner does what many might consider strange. He sends his son.

These are the farmers who have refused to pay the rent to any servants, and not only that, they beat them. Now the owner is sending his son? How could this be, is the owner crazy? Those listening can tell where this parable is going. The farmers see the son, and see this as an opportunity to take full possession of the land. Not only has the owner not punished them so far for their behavior, he is a long way off and likely would not lay claim to his land, especially after his son was killed. I bet the farmers thought themselves pretty invincible at that time.

But just like it's so much easier to see what's going to happen in someone else's story than our own, the farmers miscalculated one thing. Jesus himself said, **"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"** You can almost hear the crowd around Jesus saying the owner should punish the wicked farmers for what they had done. **"He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyards to others."** The listeners heard the parable, but they couldn't imagine it would ever happen. Never would there be such wicked people to do such a thing as the parable suggested. And yet there could, and they did.

The point that Jesus was getting across in the parable was not that it's hard to find good renters, but that he was the Son who was rejected by the leaders of Israel. It was here that Jesus brought in the well-known Psalm and asked those listening, **"Then what is meant by Psalm 118: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."** Already in the Old Testament, it was predicted that the Messiah would not be understood. The teachers of the Law and Chief priests knew exactly what Jesus meant, because they had been plotting to get rid of Jesus for a long time now. Jesus knew their thoughts and he gave them a warning.

But how did it get to this point? How did it get to the point where the religious leaders rejected the Messiah? How did it get to the point where the builders rejected the cornerstone? The Jews had been waiting for a Messiah for their entire history. But so often they didn't pay attention to what God was telling them about the Messiah. They wanted the Messiah on their terms, their way. And when the messages didn't line up with the way they thought the Messiah should be they either stoned the messengers, or they rejected that Messiah. Jesus was AN UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE not of this world.

So it should be no surprise that the Jewish leaders rejected him, because he was not of this world, they didn't understand him. Is our world any different today? I know it's pretty clear of the secular world – they certainly don't understand an out of this world Messiah, many don't even recognize their need for saving. But it's not just the secular world that instinctively rejects THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE, it can be the religious world as well. And to think that it would not be possible for us to ever reject or deny THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE would be foolish. Because it is our sinful nature that is always with us that wants nothing to do with being lined up with the cornerstone, and will reject it at every turn.

We may not outright reject THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE not of this world, but we may try to adjust it slightly, chip off a corner here or there to make it fit with our design, instead of adjusting our lives to fit with his. Perhaps an inconspicuous way in which we start going astray is when we don't constantly check if our lives line up with the cornerstone. In any masonry project, there is constant checking to make sure the wall is level, or straight, or stable, because one little deviation can cause major problems down the road. It's the same way with our faith. We may not notice a slight deviation at first, and if not checked could turn into something dangerous and potentially fatal.

Let me give you an example. There was a time in church history where dancing was considered a sin. This even infected WELS churches, where I'm told at my parents wedding, there was no dancing. Where did this come from? It came from a few passages that talked about dancing which had bad results in the Bible – when the Israelites made a golden calf they were dancing (Exodus 32), Herod was overcome by dancing and ended up killing John the Baptist (Mark 6). These are passages where dancing is seen in a negative light. So the easy thing to do is to outlaw all dancing, so it doesn't lead to sin. Not only does this make a law where there is no law, it excludes all the wonderful instances of when dancing is done in a God pleasing way. It doesn't constantly check back with the cornerstone. This may seem like a silly example, but it's just one way that our traditions can steer us away from THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE. We must constantly check to see that our lives line up with the cornerstone.

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That's the danger of taking our eyes off of THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE, the focus becomes on what we do, instead of what Christ has done. And what a job THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE HAS DONE. Yes, he was not of this world, but he came for this world. We find that in a plethora of passages like John 3:16 – “**God so loved the world...**” THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE showed unlikely love. We see that demonstrated in the parable. We wonder how could the owner of the vineyard send his son? We could ask the same question of God – why would God send his only Son to a people he knew would reject him, to a people he knew would continue to sin even after they knew who he was?

The one word to summarize God's feelings – love, agape love. It is completely undeserved, unearned. This was the reason Christ came into the world. This is the reason Christ continued to reach out to the religious leaders even though he knew they were plotting to kill him. This is the reason he continues to reach out to us, calling us to repentance of our sins, calling us to line up with THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE. And he warns of the consequence of not lining up with him. He puts it very clearly – **“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”** The cornerstone which man rejects, but God has chosen will be a stumbling block for some, those who do not line up with God's Word.

Don't get me wrong, it's not like God relishes the fact of breaking people or crushing them. But that is the consequent result of rejecting the cornerstone God has chosen. He would much rather have all people be built up into the house of God, all in line with the cornerstone. But unfortunately that will not happen. And yet that is not God's fault, but man's fault.

How does all of this tie in with my life today? It has everything to do with tying into your life. Instead of shaping Christ to fit in with my life, I must fit my life in with Christ's. And this is only done by God's power – for he is the one who chose me, I did not choose him. And he has not chosen us to just be part of the building, he has called us to share the message with others. And what do you know, we have this wonderful opportunity to do just that coming up shortly. In two short weeks it will be Easter, an easy invite opportunity. We even have flyers ready for you to give to your friends and neighbors if you don't like to talk with them, you can help out with distributing them throughout Rita Ranch and Vail on Saturdays.

I began this morning talking about favorites and underdogs. How do we view Christ – as the favorite or the underdog? Even though we may consider him the favorite in here (which we know he is), I wonder if we act like he is the underdog in our everyday lives. It's almost as if we don't expect anything to come of our efforts. But if we believe he is the favorite, then there's no reason to think that he won't win, there's no reason to think that his Word isn't powerful, there's no reason to think he will not bring those he has chosen to faith, there's no reason he won't use you to do it. Christ may be AN UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE, but he is THE UNLIKELY CORNERSTONE whom we expect to win. Let's share that message. Amen.