

“The Cornerstone”

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Mark 12:1-12

Lay Minister

Psalm 86: 8-13

First Lutheran Church

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Lord, let the words off my lips and the mediation of my heart be pleasing to you, My Creator, The Sustainer, Our Redeemer. Amen

In Jesus’ time, most people could not read or write. Story’s and traditions were shared orally. Several scriptures from the Old Testament like Isaiah and Amos existed and they were passed down through the generations in the spoken form. The Psalms were songs that were often sung and memorized.



If we are able to go to a nursing home or memory care unit today and if we started to sing “Amazing Grace” or “How Great Thou Art” most residents, no matter their level of dementia, would be able to recall these familiar words and join in with us. In fact, many facilities use hymn singing as a form of therapy. There are countless examples of how music brings us back to a place, a time, and a feeling from our past.

Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 both tell a story in the form of a song. The Lord planted a vineyard and prepared the land for productivity, but it yielded wild grapes, so the Lord tore it down. This lyric would have been very familiar to most and well known by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. These were the people that Jesus was speaking to in the gospel text for today.

At the time of this parable, Jesus had already arrived in Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and people had laid down their coats and palm branches for him. (Because of the liturgical season we will read that text on Palm Sunday.) Jesus was pretty well known at this time and had a large group of followers around him wherever he went. Unlike earlier on in the book of Mark,

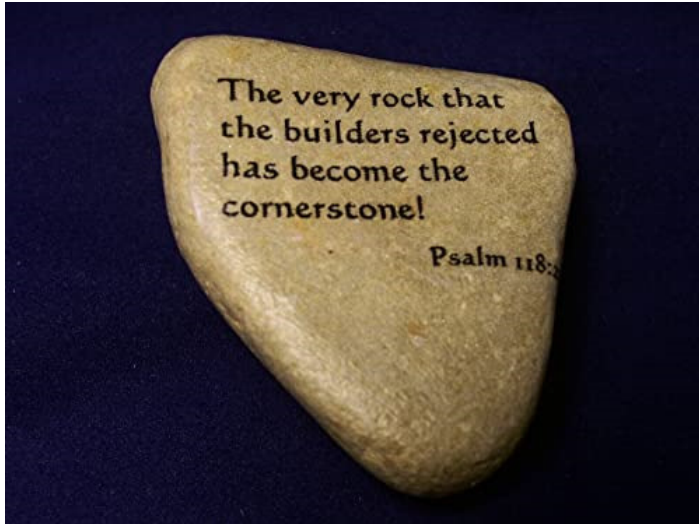
Jesus is no longer trying to hide who he was, the Son of the Lord, God incarnate, All-powerful and All-mighty. Jesus had already driven the money changers from the temple and he was not mincing words with the chief priests.

Those in positions of authority in the church questioned Jesus. They wanted to catch him saying that he was God so that they could accuse him of blasphemy, arrest him, and kill him. They said to him: "On what authority do you do these things?" Jesus answers a question with a question, to which they did not know the answer. So Jesus tells them the parable of the wicked tenants.



At first, the hearers get upset with these murderous tenants. It was typical in those days for a landowner to set up the land and hire help and not be there working the land with the tenants. One would expect that the landowner would get their share of the crop when it came time for the harvest. Instead of receiving cash rent as many landowners do now, this landlord was doing sharecropping with the tenants. But what do the tenants do? They beat up and send away the ones sent to collect some of the crop, they even kill some. Well, this seems out of line. Many would want these tenants brought to justice and others left to wonder why the master keeps sending individuals to be slaughtered instead of an army to clean house. So what does the landowner do? He sends his only beloved son. You can see where this is going. The tenants devise a plan. They think if they kill the heir they will be able to keep the land and it will become theirs.

The Pharisees at this point in the parable are caught up in the story. Jesus asks them what they think the landowner will do? They respond that he will destroy the tenants and give the land to another. Then Jesus reveals that the story he is talking about is his own, through reciting Psalm 118. "Do you not recall, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes."



This parable is yet another foreshadowing of what is to come for Jesus. He is the beloved son of the Lord. God built a wonderful vineyard for his people to live in and work in and all God wants in return is their praise. Countless prophets are sent to tell of God's love and power, but they are all killed by the tenants of this world. So God sends his own Son, not to collect, but to teach and lead and die for our sins. God's love is steadfast. It endures forever. As the first lesson from Psalm 86 reads, "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours."

Our God is a selfless God. God gives and gives and loves and loves when we hurt our Lord, when we kill God's messengers, and when we refuse to give God the praise our Lord deserves, God does not retaliate. God sends his only Son to die for you and me. It does make sense and it can't because God is not human. The love and forgiveness the Triune God offers is unimaginable, yet present and available. Through the belief in Jesus' death and the resurrection, we are given new life.



Left to our own devices, we are sinful humans, but through the grace of God, we are all beloved people. Our God is relentless. The Father has never left us. The Holy Spirit is chasing after **you**. God wants each one of us, all of us; our whole hearts, our whole lives, our whole trust. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are called to be in communion with God and one another. God moves in and through **you** to make this world a better place. As we enter into meaningful fellowship with Christ and share the good news of the Lord, the Holy Spirit is revealed, actively mending and harvesting. Jesus is the cornerstone, the rock upon which our faith is built. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it. (Psalm 118:24) A Psalm that was sung through the ages, a hymn that is familiar to the elderly, and one we still sing today. Isn't it ironic that it is the verse that follows directly after Jesus's cornerstone quote to the Pharisees.

Jesus was sent for you. Through Jesus' God reveals his boundless, amazing and enduring love for you. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his book *Life Together*: "The beginning of the day should not be oppressed with besetting concerns for the day's work. At the threshold of the new day stands the Lord who made it. All the darkness of the night retreats before the clear light of Jesus Christ. All unrest, all impurity, all care, and anxiety flee before him. Therefore at the beginning of the day, let the first thought and the first word belong to him to whom our whole life belongs." Rejoice in the day and the new life which we are given again and again. Sing out for joy, let the words be etched in your mind as they are written on your heart. This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.

Aside:

We cannot ignore the certain and pending pandemic that is crossing this world. However and especially in times of panic, know that God calls us to turn to him for resolve. As the body of Christ, through the gifts of the Spirit, God gives us the strength to care for one another, check in on our neighbors, encourage and support one another, and pray for healing and wholeness for all people.

Combatting fear is talked about more than anything in the bible. The news feeds are flooding people's sensories. Throughout all of history and in all times, people have faced fear. Psalm 56:3 says "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Isaiah 41:10 says "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

For times such as these, we are church. We are called by God to trust in him and to trust that God will use us in ways we could never imagine. Psalm 23 brings comfort to so many. The evils of this world are often in things we cannot see or fail to recognize. Continue to be precautious and use good sanitary practices, but do not stop loving and caring for your neighbor. Pray for those who have weak immune systems, find a way to connect to those who are isolated, be the body of Christ comforting and loving all those that suffer. Our strength comes from the Lord. Take solace in the Word and use this time to spread the Good News, that Christ died for all of our sins and through his death and resurrection we have new life with him here and now. This promise is one that we want everyone to be infected with.