

May 14, 2017, 5th Sunday of Easter

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Focus: Jesus makes the rejected precious.

This week I spent a little bit of time looking at the church's original building plans. A lot has changed over the years at Resurrection, as you know. From the original days meeting at where the McDonald's is now through the new church in 1967 through the expansion in the '90s until where we are now. In other ways, looking at the original plan, I was surprised that not as much has changed as you might think. Reading one of the letters, I recognized the name of the treasurer, one Arthur Martin. And I saw something else that made me chuckle. On top of the blueprint over the location of the original kitchen, someone had written in large, red cursive letters that left no room for debate, "RIDICULOUSLY SMALL!"—which obviously later generations ended up agreeing with.

Our lesson from 1 Peter today takes the building plan idea and runs with it. He talks about something we might not have thought of: the cornerstone. Now for us, the cornerstone largely has a ceremonial function. If you step outside the narthex and look behind the bush, you can see ours, which just has the date that the church was built in. But traditionally, the cornerstone, as Wikipedia says, is "important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure."

The cornerstone is important because everything else is going to be structured around it. What you choose as a cornerstone says a lot about what your entire building is going to look like. Now obviously, with all the talk of "living stones," 1 Peter's using a metaphor. He's not really talking about a church building. He's talking about what is the cornerstone in our lives.

What are the things in our lives that call for us to rearrange our entire lives around them? What are the things in our lives that determine the position of the entire structure of our day-to-day calendars? What are the things in our lives that we plan our financial budget around? Where or for what are we spending our time and energy, what do we stay up at night thinking about? What is most precious to us? Chances are it's pointing toward our own cornerstone.

1 Peter says that Jesus is the stone that was rejected by the builders. But really based on what we just heard, based on when we think about our own cornerstones, it's not hard to see why, is it? If Jesus is your cornerstone, that means you are building your life around a poor man from Nazareth born in a stable. If Jesus is your cornerstone, that means you're building your life around a man who picked 12 disciples, one of whom betrayed him, another of whom denied him, and all of whom deserted him. If Jesus is your cornerstone, that means you're building your life around the man who told the rich man, "sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor." If Jesus is your cornerstone, that means you're building your life around the man who died a criminal's death on a cross. That doesn't seem like a very firm foundation to us. And yet, 1 Peter says that Jesus is "a cornerstone chosen and precious in God's sight."

It turns out that God's building plans are different from ours. It turns out that Jesus, the crucified man, is the one person who was essential in God's master building plan. Think about all the famous people God could have chosen to make his cornerstone: Abraham, Moses, King David, or someone powerful or rich or influential. And instead it was Jesus. Jesus the man who from

manger to cross was poor, who was betrayed, who suffered, who was condemned, he is the chief cornerstone. He is the one who is precious in God's sight. And if you want to know what living as God created us is really all about, he's the cornerstone in our lives.

Jesus is not the cornerstone we might think to choose. But he is the one whom God has chosen for us. We find him here in this church just as unexpectedly. In some ways, there is nothing special about what we do every week. Inside this baptismal font, you will find plain old tap water. When we practice confession and forgiveness, you and I will be the same old sinners afterward that we were before. When we sing a hymn, sometimes it's beautiful, and sometimes, this tenor can't figure out page 8 of the "Amen" anthem, and we have to change it up. When we receive the Eucharist, it's Manischewitz and Butternut Autumn Wheat sliced bread.

Everything that we do in worship isn't great in-and-of-itself. It's ordinary. It's human. It's like us. But because Christ has promised he is here with us, everything changes in relation to him. Everything is restructured around him. Jesus is the cornerstone that redefines what we do and who we are. With Jesus as the cornerstone of his church, the baptismal font becomes a life-giving water gushing up to eternal life and splashing us our entire journey through with grace, forgiveness, and purpose. Confession and forgiveness makes us not just sinners, but saints whom God has redeemed and sent to be his hands and feet in the world. The music that we sing praises God not just with voice but with the hearts that are behind it. And when we come to the communion rail, we taste and see that the Lord is good. Because Christ is the cornerstone, the entire building plan changes.

Christ is the cornerstone of our worship, but more than that, he is the cornerstone of our lives. We can try to build our own cornerstones and come up with our own plans. But in the end, we find out that everyone else is doing the same thing, and we aren't exactly the cornerstone in their mind's eye. In the end, we find out that we are one little forgotten stone among 7 billion others that we're lucky if we fit into even our own family's plans sometimes. So often we can feel forgotten or even rejected. But not with Christ as the cornerstone. With Christ as the cornerstone, that ordinariness about you and me is built into part of a beautiful living church.

With Christ as the cornerstone, you are important, you are alive, and you are precious. With Christ as the cornerstone, your gifts matter. You may not think it's much. You may think that you don't have the greatest voice or that you don't know how to pray or that you can only contribute so much to the offering plate or that you don't know how to share the Good News about Jesus or that you don't know how to help your neighbor, but Christ will have none of that. To him, you and your gifts are a precious living stone. A stone so precious that to place it in his church, he died for you. We and our gifts are living stones that he puts together into this marvelous building that is made not with human hands but that is made brick by brick with acts of love and words of forgiveness. Because Christ is the cornerstone of his church, no one can tell you that your gifts don't matter or that you don't belong here or that you aren't big enough to make a difference. Christ has created you to be a part of this church not like a puzzle piece that is smashed in and twisted and convoluted until it fits where other builders think it should go, but in a space that is fit for you—in the hope that someday, every stone will belong to this building that we call the church. You and your gifts are not "ridiculously small," but built into the living church that is bigger than our human hopes and dreams. When we realize that Christ died for the person next to us and that the Holy Spirit has given our neighbor gifts, too, how can we reject his

building plan? When we trust in Christ's building plan for the church, we find new and surprising ways that our different stones and lives fit together.

And the ultimate reality is that God has not just built this church of stones here on earth to do his work, but because of Christ, we are truly **living** stones. The building that is Christ's one holy, catholic, and apostolic church is eternal, and the best is yet to come. When Christ is our cornerstone, the building does not fall. When Christ is our cornerstone, the building does not stop at our death. In fact, we see that those stones that were laid years and centuries ago, all the saints of the faith who have gone before us, are still very much alive in this church. When Christ is our cornerstone, we not only receive the promise of Easter, but we are built onto the foundation of his resurrection. Glued together, stone on stone, with a mortar that is his precious blood flowing from the cross.

His resurrection means our resurrection. Because his building plan is our building plan. And in that plan, every one of us is precious and chosen. Everyone fits in exactly where he means us to: built upon our cornerstone. **Amen.**