

The 19th Sunday after Pentecost
“God’s gracious doing – turning evil to good!” (Matthew 21:42)
October 8, 2023
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 19th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 21:42.

**“42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:
‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”**

So far the text...

This summer when my family was visiting my parents in Lakeland Florida, we went to a children’s museum. At the very entrance of the museum hung a 20 ft. dragon that easily caught everyone’s attention. What made it so colorful and eye catching was that it was covered with discarded children’s toys. Things that don’t work or are broken or missing a part. And yet this collage of rattles, and race cars play blocks and play phones made a beautiful piece of art. It evoked memories for the child as he or she looked at it, “I played with that toy” or “look at that!”.

Isn’t it true that sometimes the seemingly insignificant things in life sometimes make a memorable impact on your day. After this extremely hot summer, wasn’t it nice just to walk outside in the afternoon yesterday, and enjoy the day without sweating? Or, how about of the blue, you receive a text from someone who says, “I was thinking about you today, so I asked God to give you strength and peace in Jesus.” What little thing made a positive difference in your week?

Our text speaks to us about the stone that was discarded as worthless and yet became the most important Chief Cornerstone. What was seen as unattractive makes the whole building beautiful, strong, and valuable. What am I talking about? Well, you know, of course “who” I am talking about – Jesus! He was rejected by those appointed by God to build His church. The chief priests and Pharisees, put in charge by God to build His church, thought they could build it their own way...better than God.

And instead of receiving Jesus in faith, teaching Jesus to the people as the Savior of the world, they made themselves the chief cornerstone. Look at us! Look at our righteousness! See if you can reach our level. They made themselves as the gods for the people, leading them astray with endless manmade laws, and rejected the owner of the vineyard's Son! They killed Him and thought they could seize His inheritance!

What a sad story this was. The vineyard owner had graciously made a beautiful vineyard with a hedge around it, a tower and a winepress. Everything that was needed to produce the best wine was prepared and leased to the vinedressers to take care of.

This, of course, is a word picture as we heard in Isaiah 5, our Old Testament reading, of the special covenant God made with His chosen people the Israelites. They were given God's Word that protected them as hedge from the false gods of the nations around them. They had a winepress that continually reminded them through the sacrifices of the animals of the coming final sacrifice of the Messiah. And they had a watch tower of prophecies to continually keep them watching for the Messiah's coming.

Yet, when He came – when Jesus came, the leaders of God's vineyard, His Old Testament Church, rejected Him! They crucified God's Son. And to this day, the Jews who continue to follow the Pharisee's false teaching of a still coming Messiah, build a false church that will never stand.

Yet, Jesus spoke to their raging hateful hearts the very Scripture that they as the church leaders knew.

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

The evil that they did to Jesus God turned into the greatest most marvelous good! In Jesus' death and resurrection God's New Testament Church is founded. God alone could do this! All appeared utterly lost. Jesus hung lifeless on the cross. He was placed in a tomb and it was sealed. The Rock was rejected and sealed with a

rock in death. Discarded. Thrown away on the heap of worthless rocks that were deemed useless for building.

Yet, God's plan used this evil for the world's eternal good! He took this rejected Rock and brought Him to life three days later and proclaimed His victory over all evil. By Jesus' death He made the final sacrifice that ushered in the New Testament church. There are no more needed sacrifices of bulls or goats for Jesus the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world once and for all!

As we approach the celebration of the Reformation once again in few weeks, we remember the watch words of the Reformation: Christ alone, Grace alone, Word alone, Faith Alone, Glory to God alone! We remember how God won our salvation for us by Christ alone. By Grace alone, God did all for our salvation. Our righteousness as Paul says in the epistle from Philippians 3 is a loss - rubbish.

“that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection,”

Through His Word alone, God marvelously proclaims to our eyes this Gospel of salvation which God gives through faith alone. Indeed, all glory to God alone! He has graciously leased His vineyard to others. Who are these others who are hedged in by these great solas? Each of you believers in Jesus. All of us Gentiles are the others that God extends His grace to.

All who are built in this New Testament church, on the Rock, Jesus, have been graciously given life. And through the sacraments, the wine press of the New Testament Church you are connected, cemented into Jesus' resurrection in baptism, and also fed with forgiveness through Holy Communion!

We who were lost are found. We who are evil have been forgiven by Christ's righteousness. Our debt has been paid. We have graciously been given the full day's wage for work in His vineyard which we don't deserve. For God promises to always give us what is right and fair – Jesus' righteousness!

And now God's gracious vineyard is given to each of us to work in and bear fruits of our faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit, each of us has been given gifts and talents to use for the good of God's church.

Each of us have a role to play in proclaiming what has been marvelously shown to our eyes – the Chief Cornerstone Jesus. In your homes and in your circles of friends and neighbors, you have been given the opportunity to be the watch tower to tell others what is marvelous in your eyes. You can tell others, like Paul of the excellencies of knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior. You can tell others of the power of His resurrection for all people – how what was deemed worthless is priceless, how what was forgotten as dead is the life of the world! How everything in this world, everything that the world holds high and adores is a loss and rubbish compared to knowing Jesus. How in Him alone is found your eternal good! Your eternal life!

“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

Those who reject Jesus will be destroyed, Jesus says. But, He turns evil into good by extending His kingdom of grace to others – to you and me. Now is our season, our time to serve in His vineyard. Now is our time to proclaim Christ alone to all who would build their homes and castles on themselves alone.

Hear once again the beautiful words in Peter 2 of how God builds His people on the Chief Cornerstone.

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Jesus says in our Gospel that **“the kingdom of God will be ...given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”**

As nations this day wage war in our world with thousands of rockets causing destruction invoking declarations of war on others, there is a kingdom where peace reigns, where grace reigns. This war has already been won by Christ by His death

on the cross. The Chief Priests and Pharisees, led by the devil, did their worst and cast Jesus aside. But God used their evil for the good of the whole world with His atoning, saving sacrifice. This good news has been revealed to you so that you have peace in your heart in a world of turmoil, darkness, and hate! So, Peter continues in chapter 2 in this most well-known cherished description of God's church – you and me included.

“you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

Soli Deo Gloria. All glory to God alone! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)