

Luke 20:9-20

April 10, 2019

“The stone that the builders rejected”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

5th Wednesday in Lent

Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction]

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

During this year’s spring confirmation trip, we took a boat tour of the Chicago River and Lake Michigan, revealing to us exactly why Chicago is known as the “Windy City.”

On the tour we also saw on the tour some of the historic and architecturally significant buildings along the river’s edge, many of which are known for their visual beauty, their height, and the ingenuity of their design.

Many of these buildings had significant challenges that needed to be overcome in order to be built structurally sound. The tall buildings in particular had to be able to withstand Chicago’s wind. But the architects were up for the challenge, thinking up a variety of ingenious solutions to make their buildings safe.

And as a result, the architects grew in their fame by overcoming these problems and creating the beautiful and impressive structures that are unique to the city of Chicago.

[God’s Blueprint for Salvation]

Throughout history people have amazed the world with the buildings and structures they’ve built: the pyramids, the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal, and the Great Wall of China just to name a few.

But there is one building project that has been ongoing for thousands of years, which surpasses them all.

That’s the Church.

And no, you're right. The church is not a building; although some Cathedrals are quite impressive. But the church isn't built with stone or bricks or steel. It's built with people.

With the church, God's architectural ingenuity goes beyond anything humanity would ever think possible. He defies all human logic and builds his church on weakness, which he makes strong. And by doing so, more than any human architect, God displays his skill and his power.

In the parable of the wicked tenants, Jesus revealed the true challenge and glory of God's plan. In the parable, the wicked tenants represented the leaders of Israel and the servants sent to the vineyard represented the prophets of the Old Testament who were reviled and rejected for delivering God's Word. And finally, the son of the vineyard owner represented Jesus, who the leaders of Israel would kill.

The people listening to this parable were horrified and said, "Surely not!" But then Jesus revealed that all this was part of God's master plan, for "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." (*Luke 20:17*)

Jesus was the stone that the builders rejected, but whom God chose to make the cornerstone, the load bearing support of His entire church. And He would do this by letting the stone be broken – by letting His Son be killed on the cross.

[*The Cornerstone*]

The idea that God's messiah, Jesus, would have to die in order to usher in God's kingdom for his people was absurd to those who heard it.

The Apostle Paul writes, "we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (*1 Corinthians 1:23-25*)

God is the master architect and engineer, and He has shown us the depth of His skill. He took the broken body of Jesus; that cracked and shattered cornerstone, and He repaired it. He restored Jesus on the third day and revealed that the true strength of his design required a moment of ultimate weakness. Out of death, He established eternal life for all who believe.

By using methods that no one would have thought possible, God revealed His skill, His power, and His love to the world.

[*Strength in Weakness*]

And now that Jesus has been made the cornerstone, God builds the church upon him.

Paul writes, “you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (*Ephesians 2:19-22*)

This holy temple, the church, is the greatest building project in history. It’s an on going project that has been in progress for thousands of years. It stretches across the nations, and continues to grow as more and more people are joined to Christ in his church.

But this true glory of the church is not always obvious. The church is made up of weak, sinful people who have no strength of their own. The world looks at the church and thinks, “How is this thing still alive? When will it just go away?”

Sometimes we look at the church and it’s hard to see anything more than a gathering of hypocrites who fail day after day to follow Jesus’ command to love one another as he loves us. That is why the church so often appears feeble and weak.

But the fact that we are weak continues to reveal God’s skill as an architect. Jesus had to die before he could be raised up, and now we who are weak in our sin are called into Christ’s death daily, so that we can be renewed in His strength.

The church hasn’t stood for two thousand years because its members are strong. It has stood and will continue to stand because it’s strength comes from Jesus, the one who was broken and is now unbreakable.

Jesus said the Apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (*2 Corinthians 12:9*)

We were weak, so Jesus made himself weak so that he could become our strength. And in our weakness, Jesus’ strength – the strength that holds the church together – shines forth.

[*The Weight of the Cornerstone*]

But Jesus also gives us a warning in the parable of the tenants. He says, “Everyone who falls on [the cornerstone] will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” (*Luke 20:18*)

Jesus is our strong support when he is the one we are leaning on, but those who rely on themselves will stumble on the mystery of the crucifixion. When we trust in him, he gives us strength, but when we trust in ourselves, like the leaders in Israel did, we are left in our weakness and we are crushed.

So trust in his strength. Remind yourself where your strength and your life comes from. Remember the promises God has given you in your baptism. Reflect on the gift of forgiveness Jesus bought for you on the cross. And rejoice for we are weak, but he is strong. Amen

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
