

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

[Intro]

Back in 1960, there was an actress who was starring on a hit Broadway musical. The musical was such a hit, that it was decided that it would be made into a movie for the silver screen. It was confirmed that the lead actor from the musical would reprise the role in the movie. However, that was not the case for the lead actress. You see, producer Jack Warner was convinced that the Broadway actress did not have sufficient name recognition for her casting in the film.

So, instead of casting the Broadway actress, Warner chose a sure winner. He said that his decision was easy, "In my business, I have to know who brings people and their money to the cinema box office," he said.

But, instead of casting an actress who could act and sing for the part, the production team had an actress on stage and another who sang the part.

The movie turned out to be a financial success. The film won eight Academy Awards in 1964, including Best Picture, Best Actor and Best Director.

So, what happened to that actress who didn't get the part? Well, she went on to win Best Actress at that very same Academy Awards. She even acted and sang her role. Oh, it was a different part, but she won. Although, Mr. Warner wasn't convinced that she could make it on the silver screen, another man was convinced.

So, what do you do when you face rejection? Do you just quit and call it a night? Or do you learn from it and become a success?

[Stay Awake]

We have all faced rejection at one point or another. Whether it is not being selected to make the team. Being the last person picked at a gym class activity. Or, being overlooked for your dream job. Or, overlooked for a pay raise. At one point or another we have thought of ourselves as being the outcast.

As Christians, we live our lives as the outsiders of the world. The world claims that Christians are judgmental, hypocritical, old-fashioned, out of touch with reality, insensitive, not accepting of other faiths.

It may seem easier to just get along with the world. Well, actually, it is. But, we know that we are at the same time both saints and sinners. The world may proclaim

that we are hypocritical, since we do not live up to God's law. But that isn't quite the meaning of hypocritical. A hypocrite is someone who professes one thing and believes in something else. But as I just said, we are saints and sinners at the same time.

We believe that Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins through His death upon the cross and rising to life to justify us all. Because of His life, death and resurrection, we believe in what He has told us. Yes, we may be old-fashioned, but we believe in what Jesus has told us, because He never lies. According to Mark's Gospel, Our Lord Jesus said last week, ***“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake.”*** Then He later said, ***“And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”*** (Mark 13:32, 37)

This week, Jesus says a similar warning in Luke's Gospel, ***“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”*** And Jesus says again, ***“But stay awake at all times.”*** (Luke 21:34, 36a)

Many of you may want to have the sinful desires of the world, but Jesus says, “Stay awake.” As Christians, we await the second-coming of our Lord Jesus, this is especially significant during the season of Advent. Advent literally means “coming.” So stay awake and be ready for the coming of Christ.

[Living Stones]

As we stay awake for Christ's second coming, we are like living stones.

Living stones? What is a living stone?

Well, a stone is a piece of rock that is used for a particular purpose.

As the Apostle Peter writes through inspiration, ***“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Peter 2:4-5)

We have a particular purpose! When we were baptized with the Water and the Word in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we became Christ-like. We became little stones! As stones, Jesus Christ mortars us all together into a grand building called the holy Christian church.

Isn't it interesting that we are called stones rather than bricks?

Bricks are all alike; stones are all different – in color, texture, size and shape. No two of us look alike or act alike. But there is a place for all of us – saints and sinners – in God’s building.

At the same time, as living stones, we are all of the holy priesthood. We represent God before the world. We are all God’s holy priests and carry out His ministry to the world. We also offer spiritual sacrifices. We offer the sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving to our God.

[The Cornerstone]

But we can do only so much as living stones. We need a solid foundation.

Today, the laying of a cornerstone has a mostly ceremonial purpose. The cornerstone’s face bears the year of construction, and if a Lutheran church it may have UAC engraved next to that year. In fact, UAC is engraved into the cornerstone that is in Our Redeemer’s narthex.

When in school at Concordia Seminary, I often work as a tour guide. When I make my way with the tour to the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus, I usually ask what the UAC stands for on the cornerstone of the chapel. To this day, nobody has gotten it. Although some have come close. In case you don’t know – and are now curious – UAC stands for “Unaltered Augsburg Confession,” which means that we adhere to the original Augsburg Confession.

Today, cornerstones are typically only good for the date of construction, identification, or as a place to store a time capsule.

But, the original use of a cornerstone was much different than it is used today.

The real structural value of the cornerstone, if you are a stone mason, is to serve as the point of reference for the straightness of the building. The cornerstone is the first, and also the largest, stone above grade. As such, it must be quarried, measured, sawed, shaped, and finally mortared into place with great precision.

You see, masons build a building up from the corners. The first stone will determine the straightness of the building’s lines of depth, width, and height. If the cornerstone is off by just a little, the entire building will end up looking crooked, because all the rest of the building gets their lines from the cornerstone.

Peter cites from Isaiah 28: ***“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*** (1 Peter 2:6)

Jesus Christ is our cornerstone! Only He can determine the standard of straightness in our lives. In a world that says Christians are out of touch with reality, the Word of the Lord remains straight and true. Without Jesus, we would be wandering aimlessly, like the world. We would just be individual stones and not a building.

For those who disobey and disbelieve the gospel message, Jesus becomes a stumbling stone. Jesus promises unlimited blessings to all who put their trust in Him, but the opposite is true to those who do not put their trust in Him.

Because of what Jesus has done for us, we do not stumble. We are not worthless.

In a world full of Satan's lies and deceptions about us, the Word of the Lord remains straight and true. God's Word of Law cuts through the excuses, rationalizations, and moral compromises of all ages and cultures and holds us all accountable to God's unchanging standards. His Word of Gospel cuts through all of Satan's lies about our own worthlessness and despair and holds before us the unchanging love of the crucified and risen Christ.

Whoever builds his or her life along these true lines of the cornerstone will never regret it, neither in their earthly life nor on judgment day.

[Conclusion]

So, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are not overlooked. Although Julie Andrews was overlooked for the part of Eliza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady", she was chosen by Walt Disney for the role of Mary Poppins. As God's people, we were chosen at Creation to be His – to be His living stones.

It may seem like we are cast aside by the culture, but we have been guaranteed the eternal reward. We were all chosen by God to be His own. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. We are a people who proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Savior, who were all called out of darkness and into his marvelous light!

And now we wait – we wait for Jesus to come again! Amen!

Now, let us sing a joyful noise unto the Lord! Amen!