

The First Baptist Church, Midland
Ephesians 2:11-21
March 2, 2008 (Fourth Sunday in Lent)

Jesus Is the Cornerstone
Fourth In the Lenten Series Entitle **Rock n' Roll**
Theme: Rejection

Can you believe it? We are already into the fourth week of our Lenten worship series. Hopefully the themes to this point have touched you in some way. Remember, we talked about foundations on week one and looked to the parable encouraging us to build our house of faith upon the rock rather than the sand. The second week found our David tossing stones with the Bible's young David at the enormous Goliath while considering the fact we all have gifts that can be used to challenge the giants in our lives. Last Sunday we focused our thinking upon judgment looking to the stories of the stoning of Stephen and the young woman caught in adultery to discover that in the eyes of God it is more important to remove the beam in our own eye rather than searching for the speck that might be found in our neighbor's.

Now on this fourth Sunday of Lent as we gather around the communion table, we are going to focus our thinking upon the concept of "rejection". Who among us, I wonder, cannot identify with this hard reality. Every person in this room has been rejected at some point along the way. And it isn't a pleasant experience, is it?

It's frightening, I think, to consider how rampant and how dangerous this dynamic has become. It has never been an easy emotion with which to deal, but it has gone to the extreme. I'm thinking of the horrible scenes playing themselves out in our high schools and colleges. In recent years... in recent months... how many times have we seen young men who have been rejected by their peers and sometimes their families, too, suddenly snapping and taking loaded guns on their campuses killing people at will before turning the weapons upon themselves. I can't imagine the depth of loneliness, bitterness and hatred they must have felt to be driven to such extremes. Almost always, in these instances, rejection is a major part of their motivation.

This morning, we're focusing upon another extreme example wherein rejection has led to loss of life. Of course I'm referring to the crucifixion and our worship team chose this story from Ephesians with its cornerstone theme upon which to build our important lesson. Turn with me to the second chapter, if you will, and I will begin reading in the 11th verse.

"So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision' – a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands – remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and

might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” (Ephesians 2:11-22)

As we said, this passage makes obvious reference to the *cornerstone* theme. In this context, it is a positive sign of strength. Jesus is referenced as the fundamental or as the “key” stone for the building of our Christian faith. In him and through him we find a way to break down all the barriers that tend to stand between people. However, before we come to this point in Paul’s theology, we see there is a strong theme of rejection preparing the way.

For example, there is the rejection the Jews themselves experienced. The 118th psalm gives some good insight into their struggle. Remember what it says? *“The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.* (Psalm 118: 22)

As the psalmist was writing these words, he was painting an image of his own people. You see, in this era before Christ “the cornerstone was more than simply a place on which to write the date of a building. It was the most important stone in the entire structure. It alone would establish a building’s ground level. It alone assured that the foundation would be solid. The cornerstone ensured that all the other stones would be kept in line, straight and level and secure. God said that the people of Israel would be the world’s cornerstone, that ultimately they would be powerful and respected and honored.” (Steven Molin. Journey of Stones. CSS Publishing: Lima, OH. 2002. Pg. 18) The good life... the faithful life would be measured by the way they lived and worshipped God.

However, that didn’t happen. To the contrary, though the Jewish community may have been God’s chosen stones, they were rejected by the rest of the world. They didn’t live in a way that was consistent with their intended call. In fact, they moved away from God time and time again. Consequently, their lives were disrupted and their faith was challenged and sometimes dismantled. And this is what the psalmist is pointing toward.

Now come forward in time. As Christians looking back we can see that there is a messianic tone to these words. This theme with its spiritual connections for Christians is clearly played out a second time only this time Judaism is responsible for the rejection and for the fractured relationship with the Gentiles or with the Christians. In their eyes, anyone uncircumcised was not to be accepted by God’s chosen. Jesus, however, abolished those laws in favor of grace and soon found himself being rejected by the very people who had experienced the pain and sting of spiritual rejection themselves.

It’s ironic, I think, that it is within faith communities that some of the world’s most violent rejection takes place. Looks what’s happening today in the Middle East with the bitterness and hatred living itself out between the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities.

But Jesus calls us to a better day. As Paul says, “**he is our peace**” and he truly does have the power to break down the dividing wall of hostility which exists between people. He shows us that we do not have to live finding our truth by rejecting everyone else. He shows us the way to God and demonstrates clearly the power of the Spirit.

You and I may not be able to change the entire world through our individual actions, but we surely do have the power to change the families and the neighborhoods and the communities and the institutions in which we live, don't we. Jesus demonstrates that there is no room for rejection in our lives and there is no more powerful symbol of this truth than this table.

Yes, Jesus demonstrated how to live in the face of rejection. He helped us see that we are called to love others and to forgive those who hurt us. It's the only answer to rejection that has life changing power and enduring impact. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth aren't going to get it done. If you reject me and I reject you in return, what have we accomplished? We've simply added to the dividing wall of hostility Jesus has come to dismantle.

If the cross teaches us anything, it's that love ultimately wins. Remember his words while suffering a painful and degrading death because there were people rejecting his new way of understanding God? *Father, please forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.*

This morning as we prepare to come to this table, we're going to do something a little different. Communion is a time to remember what Jesus has done for us as we seek to find forgiveness for the things we have done to him.

How have you rejected Jesus? Yes, we all do it every time we fail to live up to his great commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves... Or as Jesus tells us in Matthew 25, every time we do something to ignore or hurt another we are rejecting God's Son.

So this morning as you prepare in heart and mind to receive this bread and cup, I want to encourage you to think about those places in your life where you have rejected Jesus. (Share instructions for proceeding to the cross and to the table.) And as you do, please remember... the *stone* that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone...

Please come to his cross and his table... and find your peace!

Amen and AMEN!