

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Fifth Sunday After Easter, May 22, 2022**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 466, 217: 3-4, 460, 312, 465.

Lessons: Isaiah 5: 1-7, First Peter 2: 2-10, Matthew 21: 33-46.

Sermon Text: Luke 20: 9-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I know that some of you have purchased lumber from a self-service lumber yard where you got to look through a pile of boards and select the ones you wanted. Some boards looked so poor and twisted and flawed that you would not think of using them for your building project. You did not think them appropriate for your project. The same thing might be true if you were to select stones for a building project – whether it would be cut stones like Mankato Stone or natural field stones. As you would look at a selection of stones, you would surely reject some. Today let us consider

**THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE**

- 1. That stone is JESUS CHRIST, God’s only-begotten Son.**
- 2. His Heavenly Father is the Owner of the vineyard in the parable.**
- 3. When the caretakers of the vineyard rejected and killed the Son of God, the caretakers themselves were rejected and destroyed eternally by the Owner.**

In the verses just before our text, Jesus had had a disagreement with the leaders of the Jews. This is not surprising, but we are now looking at events on Tuesday of holy week. In the last verse of our text we read *“The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately.”* In two days, Jesus WILL be arrested and taken prisoner so that he may be killed. The circumstances of this disagreement are found in the verses immediately before our text: *“One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. ‘Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,’ they said. ‘Who gave you this authority?’ He replied, ‘I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John’s baptism--was it from heaven, or from men?’ They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” he will ask, “Why didn’t you believe him?” But if we say, “From men,” all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.’ So they answered, ‘We don’t know where it was from.’ Jesus said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”* Luke 20:1-8 (NIV) They were upset and angry that someone such as this person, Jesus of Nazareth, would say the things he is saying and they probably hoped to intimidate him into silence. However, scripture continues: Jesus *“went on to tell the people this parable: ‘A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.’”* Anyone who knew the Isaiah lesson we read earlier would know that the owner of the vineyard is God, and that the vineyard is a picture for his chosen people, the Jews. Isaiah wrote: *“The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”* Isaiah 5:7 (NIV). The owner of the vineyard, God, had a right to expect some fruits, which are repentance, holiness, and righteousness. God sent his prophets to his people. They were ignored, they were stoned, they were beaten, they were sent empty-handed away. They had nothing good to say to God about the people of Israel, no fruit to give. It is like sharecroppers totally ignoring their responsibilities to the landowner. Your knowledge of United States history would show that sharecroppers who would treat the landlord in such a shameful way wouldn’t have their position for long! Look at the pictures from the Word of God: *“At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.”* We must emphasize that it is not simply three

prophets who were beaten. Three is a number often used in the Word of God to indicate completeness, as in the case of the Triune God. The idea here is that God's chosen people, his vineyard which should have brought forth fruit, had many chances. And after the third time, we can think of the current legal picture of the 'third strike and you're out!' No more chances. They had many centuries of 'chances' to bring forth fruit.

2.

Finally the 'landlord', who is really "THE LORD JEHOVAH", decides that he will send his one and only son. This is the Son of whom God said at his baptism: ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*** Matthew 3:17 (NIV) God said the same thing at his transfiguration, adding the words to the followers of Jesus ***"Hear ye him!" "Listen to him!"***

But what did the tenants do? ***"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'" This was not a spur of the moment decision. This was not a decision made in haste or in anger. They talked it over, and it was a planned decision, a premeditated decision to murder the Son of God. Can you imagine the secret meetings of the leaders of the Jews, the scheming, the 'behind-the-scenes' maneuvers to find how they could get rid of Jesus Christ, God's Son? There must have been some rumors of their intentions floating around Jerusalem. That is evident in the way Judas approached the leaders of the Jews and bargained with them to give Jesus over to them. "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present."*** Luke 22:1-6 (NIV) In Matthew 26 we read that ***"Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins."*** Matthew 26:14-15 (NIV) The leaders of the Jews wanted to get rid of Jesus. They surely thought, as did the tenants in the parable, that if they got rid of the Owner's Son, even though they did not recognize him as God's Son, then they could do what they wanted with the inheritance. Then things would go well with them and they could do what they pleased.

***"So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."*** Could there be any clearer prophecy of what would happen to Jesus? We know that is the picture Jesus is painting. He is doing it quite dramatically, too, for he immediately goes on ***"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."***

Luke records the response of the people: ***"When the people heard this, they said, 'May this never be!'"*** The people could see the injustice of this. They were indignant at such wickedness. The idea is that "yes, that is what SHOULD happen, but God forbid that it should be this way". The people, at least at this time, were with Jesus, and not with the leaders who guided them to demand the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God's Son. But that does not excuse 'the people', nor does it excuse us for our sins which caused the crucifixion of Jesus. It is no excuse for them to say that they didn't know what they were doing, or to try to blame their leaders because THEY demanded that Jesus be crucified. It was no excuse, as Eve tried to say after the first sin: "the devil made me do it".

***"Jesus looked directly at them and asked, 'Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'" He asks them what the Holy Scriptures mean when they say: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."*** Psalm 118:22 (NIV) That is a direct quote from the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ is the "cornerstone" or the "capstone" -- the "keystone". The Greek words used can refer to a cornerstone or a capstone. The cornerstone was the stone used at the corner of the building, one carefully prepared with a perfect 90 degree angle, so that the walls going out from that corner would be a perfect right angle. But the same words are used to refer to the capstone, or keystone at the top of an arch. If that capstone is not there, the whole arch falls. It's like that piece of lumber or stone that you don't think will look right in your project: even though YOU reject it. It has found a very important use. Only here we are talking about the cornerstone of the Holy Christian Church, the body of Christ. This is the capstone or the keystone of the arch. This is the head of the corner, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, some of those prophets that the tenants beat and even killed! St. Paul, speaking to Christians tells us: ***"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner-stone."*** Eph. 2:19-20 (NIV)

Jesus then tells his hearers what will happen to those who reject him: ***“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”*** There were no doubt those listening to Jesus who could recall words from Isaiah: ***“The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.”*** Isaiah 8:13-15 (NIV) That is not a pleasant picture. The Lord God is a safe refuge to all to believe, but to those who do not believe, he is a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Surely you have all experienced that: you are walking along and stumble over a rock on the path and fall and hurt yourself. To the unbelievers, that is what Jesus Christ is. A stumbling block Even the Word of God uses that picture in First Corinthians: ***“we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 1 Corinthians 1:23 (NIV)***

The judgment on the Jews is unmistakable when we look at the details of this parable which Matthew reports: ***“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’ they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.’ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.”*** Matthew 21:41-45 (NIV)

The Jewish people were broken in pieces and scattered throughout the whole world after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jesus surely has this in mind as part of God’s judgment upon the people who rejected him. They rejected the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and God took the kingdom of God away from them. There are surely people who consider themselves Jewish who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, but there are many Jews who seek, even today, to rebuild an earthly kingdom in the geographical place called “Israel” or “Palestine”.

When we read the words ***“he on whom it [the rock – Jesus Christ] falls will be crushed”***, we cannot but help think of (Gen 3:15 NIV) where God tells Satan ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** Genesis 3:15 (NIV) Satan is the one who has been crushed by Jesus Christ. It appeared that Jesus Christ was beaten when he died, but his resurrection from the dead, to save us from eternal damnation, proved that the head of Satan was crushed and that he was finally overcome by the power of God.

In our Epistle lesson we read ***“For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.”*** 1 Peter 2:6-8 (NIV) That cornerstone is our precious cornerstone. He is the one who lays out the straight lines we children of God willingly want to follow. He is the cornerstone of the Holy Christian Church. He is the capstone of our lives, the crowning glory at the top of the arch that holds all things together. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone of our lives.

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See Him dying on the tree!

‘Tis the Christ by man rejected; Yes, my soul, ‘tis He, ‘tis He!

‘Tis the long-expected Prophet, David’s Son, yet David’s Lord;

Proofs I see sufficient of it: ‘Tis the true and faithful Word.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost;

Christ’s the Rock of our salvation, His the name of which we boast.

Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!

None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 153:1 & 4)

Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for June 15, 1997