

Luke 20:13-18

I suppose this is the classic example of being between a rock and a hard place. To fall on the stone is to be broken to pieces, and to have the stone fall on you is to be crushed. Neither option is preferable. People today are in one group or the other. In Jesus' day it was the same way, although He spoke the words of our text against those in the first group.

"The stone that the builders rejected," comes from Psalm 118. There is a word here in the Greek which is very telling. It's the word for *rejected*. Jesus chose this word which means "rejection after careful examination." The builders did not simply overlook this stone. They studied it. They examined it. They carefully, painstakingly came to the conclusion that they did not want this stone anywhere even near their building.

The meaning is clear. The scribes and chief priests are the ones, along with the others who were the leaders of God's people, to whom the vineyard was let out. When the owner's son came, they listened to Him teach; they asked Him questions; they watched Him perform miracles; they observed Him carefully, and they came to the conclusion that this man had no value. What He had to say; what He had to offer, was meaningless to them. Worse, it offended them. And so they utterly rejected Him. They threw Him out of the vineyard and onto a garbage dump called Golgotha. There they put Him to death. These builders not only refused to put Jesus into their building; they didn't want anyone else building upon Him either.

But what happens if you run full speed into a large stone? You may be attempting to knock the stone out of its place, but you're the one who will suffer the casualties. *"Everyone who falls on that stone,"* says Jesus, *"will be broken to pieces."* The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, but God made Him the cornerstone. Although He was put to death on a cross, God raised Him to life on the Third Day and set Him in place as the foundation stone for His church.

The spirit of the scribes and chief priests is alive today. We see it wherever people are actively trying to remove Christ from His church. They are running full speed into the cornerstone, hoping to dislodge it.

It can be very subtle. Leaders of God's people today (like the scribes and chief priests were in that day) - these leaders charge full speed against Holy Baptism and against Holy Communion. They are attempting to remove Christ from His place in His Sacraments. They don't want Jesus there. And it's after careful examination. But they will be broken to pieces because Jesus is the cornerstone. He will not be moved.

There is another group today which does not fall on the stone. These are not actively trying to remove Christ. They just don't care. They're indifferent. They are not interested in Baptism and Holy Communion, in Jesus and in the church. They aren't running full speed against Christ. They are running wherever life takes them away from Christ. These will not be broken to pieces, therefore. But they will be crushed, for *"the stone,"* says Jesus, *"will fall on them."*

People today really do find themselves between a rock and a hard place. But most are not even aware of it. Like the scribes and chief priests...they thought they were doing God's will in

rejecting Jesus. They were breaking themselves to pieces by running hard into this stone, and they weren't even aware of it.

What about you? Has your life taken you in between a rock and a hard place? Maybe you're thinking: "Yeah, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton." Life has a way of putting us into tough spots where no option seems to be preferable. God doesn't put us there. Our sinful flesh does. We make unwise choices in two ways: either we run at the stone, or we run away from the stone.

We have struggles in life. Perhaps they're with our loved ones - spouse or parent, or with a congregation member, or perhaps with the pastor. I struggle just like you. But we may not be aware that it's really God we're struggling with. We're running hard against Him. We're trying to dislodge His authority over us. We, like the scribes and chief priests, want to be owners of the vineyard. There are times when we really do resent His place as the cornerstone in our life.

And then there are days when, instead of running hard into the stone, we run away from it. We stop caring. We stop coming, stop giving. We let others take care of the vineyard. We're sick and tired of it. We just want God to let us be. We become, more or less, indifferent to Jesus, His Word, His Sacraments, His church.

Friend, Jesus is not here to break you to pieces, nor is He here to crush you. He is here to pull you out of that tough spot between a rock and a hard place. He went to a spot much tougher than that. He went to the cross for our sake. The tenants may have thrown Him out of the vineyard, but God cast Him into hell. Jesus was "*crushed for our iniquities,*" writes Isaiah. The whips tore Him to pieces for us. You and I make the sinful choices, but Jesus endured the cost for us. Not to make us feel guilty; to redeem us. To provide a way out of our tough spots. To give us a place that is safe with God.

That place is in your Baptism. Jesus is there for you because He promises to be there. He knows how difficult life is for you. He sees you between a rock and a hard place. And He does want you to run to Him...not to try to dislodge Him. He wants you to run to your Baptism into His tender arms.

You will not find Jesus on the cross anymore. They took His body down from there and placed it in a tomb. But He rose from the dead with the promise to be with you always where He has been placed as the cornerstone in His church.

Go to your Baptism every day. Make the sign of the cross, for the cross is in Holy Baptism. You are baptized into Christ. This means you are forgiven; forgiven of all those sinful choices in your past. This means that Jesus will not leave you between a rock and a hard place. You are too precious to Him. Your Baptism is the cornerstone of your life because Jesus is in your Baptism. To go to your Baptism each day by saying: "I am baptized into Christ," is to build your life upon Him.

There is no reason to run from Him. Nor is there any reason to try to remove Him from your life. He is your Friend, your Lord, your Savior. He is the cornerstone of His church. He is, therefore, the cornerstone of your life. Amen.