

The Cornerstone. April 28,2019 First United

Over a month ago I was here at the church and so was Dwayne Barber. Dwayne was outside taking pictures of the church. I imagine that he was taking pictures for insurance purposes. But anyway I said to Dwayne ...You are just the person I wanted to see. Dwayne, do you know if there is a cornerstone with an inscription or a plaque on it?

And his answer was..... No I don't..... So we both started to examine the foundation particularly around the front steps on the south west of the church. And we didn't find anything there. But..... look up.....Dwayne said and there on the corner of the church above those main doors, carved into the stone was the date 1912.

Not exactly what I had expected.

Psalm 118 begins O give thanks to the Lord for he is good. This is a Thanksgiving hymn and v 24 reinforces this with a verse that is known to most of us.... This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it.

But the Psalm is also about a reversal of expectations. What could have been seen negatively has now come to be seen in a positive light. As vs 22 reads.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

We think of rejection unfavourably don't we? Rejection is usually something we avoid, something we don't want to think about. And yet we know that it is a fact of life here on this earth. Each of us will be rejected many, many times in our lives.

Can you think of some times when you have been rejected?

Maybe you remember when you were a child and you can hear someone's voice saying..... You can't play with us.

.....You can't be on my team.

.....I can only have one friend over to my house and xyz is coming so you can't come.

Maybe you are thinking about a club you wanted to join but no one asked you to be one of the members.

Perhaps you are thinking about a job interview and you were told that you were not the person they were looking for.

Our opening hymn this morning from More Voices began.....When painful memories haunt each day and dreams disturb the night when life is washed with shades of grey and phantoms fill our sight That is when we need the spirit of Christ with in us, to sustain us during these times of rejection.

I went on line and I found a story about Meryl Streep. It goes something like this... When she was a young aspiring actress she had an audition for a part. At the end of the audition the man she was reading for told her that she definitely was not right for the roll. And he stated that it was unlikely that she would ever get a part because she was so ugly.

Now here was an employer who didn't just want to find a person, but he clearly wanted to inflict hurt. Why would that be?

Maybe, just because he could.He was in a position of power and he wanted to wield that power.

Maybe he was giving Meryl what he had been given. He was doing to others what had been done to him.

He was putting her down, stepping on her, trying to boost himself up.

Hurtful as it was Meryl didn't let this setback stop her for very long. She continued to audition, pulling on her own confidence and relying on the support of family and friends. And we know the result. She has many, many Oscars to her name and many other awards.

I am also reminded of a story that I heard long ago. There was a young teen age girl who was mistreated by her family. She had a very sad childhood. When she

was 16, life for her became unbearable. In her hopelessness she tried to commit suicide. Fortunately she was admitted to the Grey Nuns Hospital in Regina in time. The doctors and nurses and all the staff treated her with caring, kindness and love. She had never experienced such an feeling of belonging and acceptance. Always it had been rejection.

But like Psalm 118 ...now there was a reversal of expectations. The Medical staff inspired her and encouraged her to enter training to become a licenced practical nurse. And she did. And she became the nurse whom patients and their families loved. She was showered with praise and cards and letters of recommendation.

She had been rejected by family, perhaps the hardest cut of all. But the one who was rejected, became the cornerstone of her profession. She became a role model and a very confident, proficient, happy woman. And I believe that her family came to know her worth as well.

Sometimes rejection can be the best thing that ever happened to us.

Have you been thinking this?

Do you remember a time when you were rejected and then..... something else came along.

I can remember when a friend of mine didn't get the school the city the classroom she was hoping for. She was devastated. So she took a position in a city that she was not very happy about. But guess what it wasn't long before she met the love of her life. Soooooo.....in hindsight She would tell you That rejection was the best thing that ever could have happened to her.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This line from the Old Testament has become the most repeated phrase in the New Testament. It appears in Matthew , Mark, Luke, Acts of the Apostles and in 1st Peter.

The New testament books were written at the end of the first century or beginning of the 2nd century, so approximately 70 -80 – 90 years after Jesus death.

The writers had many years to look back in hindsight at Jesus life and death. They had many years to interpret and find meaning in the stories that were passed down orally. They knew the sacred scriptures of the old testament and they could see that this phrase in Psalm 118 fit what they believed about Jesus perfectly.

Jesus had been rejected by many in his home town, After all what did he know. The neighbours remembered his mother Mary when she was a teenager. And he was the carpenters son .

Jesus was brilliant, he was charismatic. But his understanding of God's Kingdome and his place in it and everyone else's place in itwas at odds with the Jewish laws and the Roman Occupation. It ended up that his teachings about all humanities worth were threatening to the balance of power. The Jewish authorities were being undermined by his ministry and the Romans policy was simply to put any dissidents to death.

Jesus was the stone that the builders of Jewish Society and Roman Culture rejected. But as the years went by and the new church began to form the apostles could clearly see that Jesus' way of being, his ideas and ideals, his inclusivity , and the development of peaceful social justice for all people and for all of creation was truly the cornerstone for what was becoming Christianity.

The stone that the builders rejected is the chief cornerstone of First United Church.

AndIndeed this IS the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Norma J. Hain