

Rejected by the Builders

4th Sunday of Easter (Year B)

April 25, 2021

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As we heard quoted in our First Reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* and in *Psalms 118* today, 'the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.' For us, this stone, of course, is Jesus Christ, and the builders are the powerful of this world who put Jesus to death on a cross. God, however, raised Jesus from the dead and made him the cornerstone of a new community, known as the Church. Even more broadly speaking, God made him the cornerstone of a new humanity based on love.

Jesus made it a point of befriending the marginalized people of the world. This is because he himself knew what it felt like to be rejected. As a human like us in all things except sin, he knew the feeling of being judged by the Pharisees, the shame of being unsupported by his own family and disciples, and the uneasiness of moving ahead in his ministry without the guarantee of success. That is why he could so readily identify with the poor, those with various diseases, those of a different gender or ethnicity, and those labeled sinners. He knew the pain of having so much to offer, but of not being appreciated. That hurts.

There is so much unappreciated potential in those living on the margins of our society. They have a lot to offer our communities, but oftentimes are not even given the chance to make their contributions. Instead of drawing out their goodness, gifts, and talents through encouragement and inclusion, we push them further and further away out of fear, our own discomfort, or the belief that there will not be

enough resources to go around for everyone. Whenever we do this, we are causing them greater harm than we realize. Some of us may know this harm from receiving it ourselves firsthand.

The theologian and justice leader in the 20th century, Howard Thurman, wrote about the situation of the disinherited people of this world, those who have their backs up against the wall. He said, “under such circumstances there is but a step from being despised to despising oneself.” (*Jesus and the Disinherited*, 33) Whenever we despise someone, especially someone who is already used to rejection as a daily experience, we are not only rejecting them, but pushing them to take the next step of rejecting themselves. Leading others to despise themselves is not loving our neighbor or loving our enemy. It is not Christianity. It is a sin.

Jesus challenges us to stop rejecting the marginalized of this world because when we do, we are missing out on all that they have to contribute to our communities.

Who are the people that I may be causing greater harm to by rejecting?

In this weekend’s Gospel, Jesus says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’ What makes him good is that he does not overlook any of the sheep, as a hired person might. Instead, he goes out after each straying sheep and brings them back into the one flock because each sheep has something to offer. Let us pray that we may be like good shepherds, building a community of including the rejected, with Christ as our cornerstone. Then, we may truly say, “by the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.”