

Sermon

October 8, 2023

Proper 22 Year A

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected.

has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord’s doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes’.

From our Gospel reading, found in St. Matthew 21, Jesus shares a second parable about a vineyard. As Episcopalians we understand ... wine is important. Apparently so does Jesus!

Interesting to note, this parable is based on the prophet Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard which is our Old Testament reading.

Let me set the scene: the owner of the vineyard has leased out the land. He is known as an absentee landlord, prevalent at this time in the Galilee area. He carefully gets the land ready for lease. He fenced it, dug a winepress, put up a watchtower, then turned it over to the farmhands and went off on a trip. When it was time to harvest the grapes, he sent his servants back to collect his profits.

The farmhands grabbed the first servant and beat him up. The next one they murdered. They threw stones at the third, but he got away. The owner tried again, sending more servants. They got the same treatment.

The owner was at the end of his rope. He decided to send his son. ‘Surely,’ he thought, ‘they will respect my son.’

Perhaps the Landlord was naive because he kept sending faithful servants who were rejected one by one and finally, he sent his son.

What happened next?

When the farmhands saw the son arrive, they rubbed their hands in greed. ‘This is the heir! Let’s kill him and have the profits from the harvest all for ourselves.’

They grabbed him, threw him out, and killed him.

I want for you to engage your imagination.

Picture this: You hear animals sounds, you smell animal smells, the sun is shining, people are leaning into each other trying to listen. Over on one side, in their long flowing robes, are the teachers of the Law. Then there’s the center of all the attention.

Jesus.

Jesus is teaching in the temple complex. It’s huge. I read it sat on 34 acres. The place is hustling and bustling. He is now speaking to the common listener. Agriculture was a main business. Most people could not afford their own land. They knew the importance of having a good relationship with the landlord for their own livelihood.

I love how Jesus engaged the crowds by asking them in v. 40,
“Now when the owner of the vineyard comes,
what will he do to those tenants?”

My suspension is that the crowd, most likely made up of good tenants, knew how the consequences of bad behavior: late rent or not paying the rent at all, could affect the entire industry, families like themselves.

First, they thought about his question. Then the question moved from to their heads to their hearts. Jesus seems to have that effect on people.

The crowds respond, v.41:

They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

Did they, the ‘common man’ understand the subtleness of the message that the men wearing the robes of honor heard immediately?

The message: God sent the prophets as faithful servants whose message was rejected, then God sent his son, Jesus, who was also rejected. Matthew's readers would have recognized this.

V. 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders **rejected**

has become the **cornerstone**;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes'?

Jesus quotes to them from Psalm 118, part of the Hallel.

'Hallel' is where we get our word, Hallelujah.

Hallel is a prayer of thanksgiving added to the morning service on festive Jewish holidays. The prayer, whose Hebrew name literally means "praise," is comprised of six psalms (113-118) that amount to an extended expression of praise and thanks to God for the many kindnesses bestowed upon Israel.

I want to focus on these two words: **rejected and cornerstone**.

Cornerstone:

A cornerstone also known as THE foundation stone or THE setting stone. It is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.

This architectural term is used twice in the New Testament, by Paul and by Peter ([Eph 2:20](#) ; [1 Peter 2:6](#)) to speak of the exalted Jesus as the chief foundation stone of the church, the cornerstone on which all the building depends.

Then, the New Testament draws on the Hebrew Scriptures. The prophets Isaiah and Zechariah speak about the coming Messiah ([Isa 28:16](#) ; [Zach 10:4](#)).

Isaiah 28:16, the prophet speaks God's words directly to the rulers in Jerusalem who boasted that they were immune to the scourges or 'rejections' of

life because they were secure in themselves. God said their security was false because he would lay a stone in Zion, a precious **cornerstone**, which really was secure —

Zechariah expands this promise by saying that the **cornerstone** will come from the tribe of Judah (10:4). Hmmm. Wonder what tribe Jesus was from? Jesus was from the tribe of Judah.

Rejection:

I want to share with you a story of rejection.

Here's the story of a man whose life started rather hopeful. He was the son of a country minister, and he valued education. He memorized more than three-fourths of the Bible.

As a young man, he lived in Paris and worked for his uncle who was a successful art dealer. He learned and mastered 4 languages.

He also fell in love with his landlady's daughter, who **rejected** him in favor of another. This **rejection** devastated him and led to his being fired from his uncle's gallery.

He decided to follow his father's footsteps and devote his life to God. He was sent off to southern Belgium to coal mining territories where the most miserable conditions existed. He volunteered for this assignment, finding special inspiration working with the poor, oppressed, the marginalized. He was quite effective as their pastor, and the miners nicknamed him "Christ of the Coal Mines." He ministered by giving away everything he had and living in abject poverty as if he had taken the vow of St. Francis.

However, the institution of the church did not see him as an asset but rather as extreme, so they fired and rejected him. Again, he sought refuge in his family. He was soon captivated by a widowed cousin, Kate. He declared his love for her, which Kate and her parents found repulsive thus another rejection.

Finally, he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to pursuing art. His younger brother saw potential in his paintings and agreed to support him with a monthly stipend. The younger brother was an art dealer and believed that his older brother's paintings might sell in Paris. The stipend his brother gave him was adequate for living expenses but not for buying canvases, and expensive oil paints. He often lived solely on coffee, cigarettes, bread, and the psychedelic liqueur known as absinthe. He had the bad habit of putting his paintbrushes in his mouth, exposing him to lead poisoning. He also was known to take a sip of turpentine from time to time.

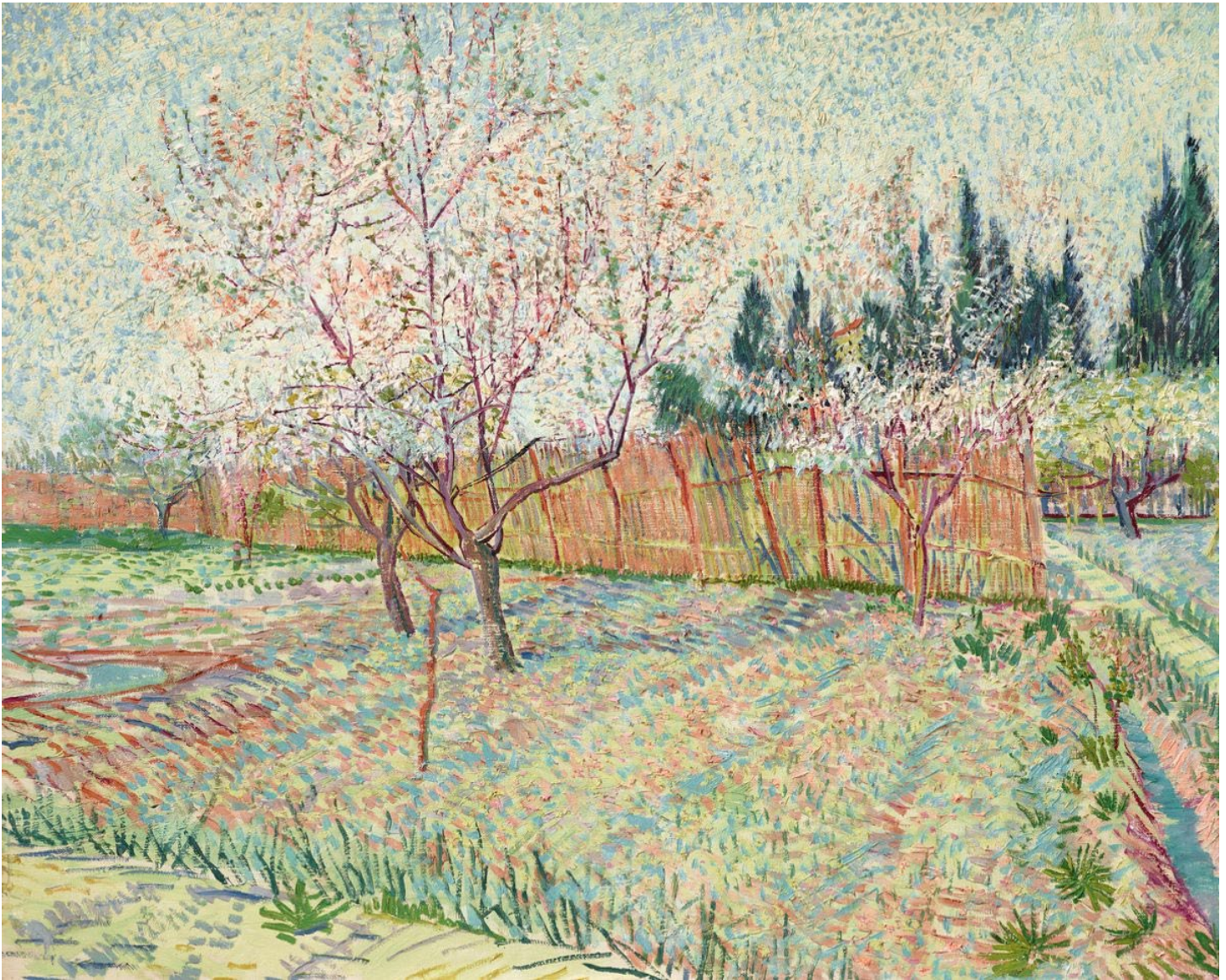
During ten years of prodigious output, he created over 2,000 paintings. Yet he experienced **rejection** from the rich art collectors. Due to his mental illness, his neighbors in the town where he lived **rejected** him and even signed a petition asking government officials for his removal.

This artist felt the pain of **rejection** most of his life.

Now, let's fast forward:

13 months ago, November of 2022, at the Christie's New York auction house, the once **rejected** artist, Vincent Van Gogh, his painting titled, [*Orchard with Cypresses*](#) (April 1888), sold for a total \$117,180,000.

A hundred and seventeen million, one hundred and eighty thousand dollars!!!!



Van Gogh's Orchard with Cypresses (Verger avec cyprès) (April 1888)

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This is what I want you to hear:

YOU are worth more than any Van Gogh painting!

But do you really believe that?

If you feel rejected or have felt rejected, know that you are in good company. I have felt the pain of rejection. And I know you have too.

Vincent Van Gogh felt despondent, lonely, and rejected for most of his adult life. Jesus, God Incarnate, felt rejected.

Here's a few suggestions for learning how to cope with rejection.

1. Acknowledge the pain and grieve the loss.

Rejection is the loss of something or someone you had or hoped to have.

Often, we feel ashamed or embarrassed when we're rejected and just want to put it behind us. Sometimes, this results in suppressing our feelings, denying that we're in pain,

Jesus acknowledged the rejection right there in the temple complex by quoting straight from Scripture, while those who were doing the rejecting stood nearby.

2. Rejection strengthens your resiliency

Resiliency is your ability to recover or bounce back from a setback. There is beauty in knowing our God experienced personal rejection, professional rejection. Jesus has gone through these similar experiences. His dear friend, Peter, rejected him three times and yet, Jesus reconciled this relationship. I find comfort in knowing that I am not alone.

3. Don't give up.

Much like our example of Vincent, even though rejected, he did not stop painting. That also goes for us. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to continue on, even in the midst of rejection. God is faithful. God understands. Jesus did not seek revenge in his rejection, but he knew the bigger plan, redemption. Jesus continued beyond the

rejection at the temple. Jesus continued to face the ultimate rejection, his death on the cross. He died by taking on himself all of our selfishness. Through his suffering and rejection, we are able to have a relationship with God. Jesus lived into his name, Immanuel, God with us.

I love our collect for today. When thinking about rejection or whatever is bothering you, consider this.

God is always more ready to hear us than we are to pray. God is always ready to give more than we either desire or deserve.