

Sermon 2023 10 08 Text

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Matthew 21.42

The stone that the builders rejected.
has become the chief cornerstone. Psalm 118:22

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I would never want to live in or inhabit for a time a building that I had built with my own hands.

While a school student could pursue manual training through to Year 12, my teachers looked at my, out of square cake tins, my wobbly timber wall hooks and my much-amended technical drawings and suggested that a more academic education would be appropriate for me.

Those skills have improved. I can now make a reasonably square bookcase that is generally strong enough to hold books, but I would not want to venture far beyond that.

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So, I stand in awe and wonder of larger structures made of timber, mud brick, clay brick and stone; and the people who built them.

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The people of Israel became experts in the manufacture of mud bricks and working in stone during their captivity in Egypt.

And I have no doubt that those skills were passed on to subsequent generations to construct homes, service buildings and places of worship.

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Within the scriptures Jesus is referred to at various times as the cornerstone, the capstone, and the keystone.

Each of these are important to the integrity of a structure in their own way.

The cornerstone is the starting stone; the first stone of the building. Therefore, it must be crafted to as close to perfection as possible for all building measurement and lines begin at the cornerstone. A small variation in the perfection of the cornerstone is multiplied time and again in the placing of each subsequent stone. So unless the builder is exceptionally careful, a small deviation in the perfection in the cornerstone becomes multiplied 1000 times at the end of an exceptionally large building.

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A capstone is the final stone of a building. It is the finishing stone, the final block of a building; the one that completes and seals the building. In the placing of the capstone there are implications that the building is finalised, water-tight, safe and ready for occupancy for purpose.

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A keystone is a wedge shaped stone at the apex of an arch or vault. It too is a final piece of construction for it is the locking stone which prevents the various sides of an arch onto itself from collapsing inward onto itself.

The keystone maintains the integrity, safety of the arch. If the keystone deteriorates, an arch can lose its integrity and ceases to be a safe place through which to pass.

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Foundation, completion and access – these are the function of three stones.

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The people of Israel rejected Jesus as the foundation of a new purpose of life.

In searching through the tons of quarried rock, they felt that their skill was not sufficient to form this piece of quarried rock into the perfect shape on which to establish a new way of understanding faith.

They either thought the stone was too hard, or they lacked sufficient skill to form the rock into a perfectly dimensioned base for a new beginning.

What they would not accept was that it was not their lack of skill that was at issue. They could not accept that after all the centuries God would form the perfect rock to be the cornerstone of a new beginning. Their eyes had grown old and weary with looking. And they had reached a stage they were blinded to the true perfection of this new foundation. Or they had reached a stage where they no longer trusted their own skills to discern a new foundation.

So many had been taken from the quarries to create the new cornerstone – but they shattered in their hands, failed to bear weight, had hidden faults where there should be none.

So many had been tried and failed, that they lost the ability to acknowledge that a new foundation stone could be found. They could not trust themselves to unify themselves to a stone with perfect cut lines, ease of forming and of such a robust nature that it could bear the weight of horrors of the world and restore them to their true state of creation.

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Or they doubted that a stone could be an effective capstone – able to complete the work of salvation, to seal the work of God into a wholeness that would stand rigid and strong for eternity.

Or they doubted that a stone could be a keystone that would hold the powers of this world apart and in tension; a keystone that would allow a space to be constantly and safely open so that we might enter the space of God; so that we might be in that new place of living; or so that that we might enter that indestructible space where, in the presence of God we could live out full and perfectly redeemed lives in the companionship of our creator.

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During our last visit to Japan, we visited White Crane Castle and Black Crow Castle. There are a couple of hundred castles in Japan but these are two of only 13 castles that were not largely destroyed by allied bombing during WWII and rebuilt after the war. Or they have withstood the impact of massive earthquakes and been so strongly built that they could not be moved.

As you look at the great stone foundations of the buildings or the castle walls you see beautifully precise masonry. But every

so often you see what appear to be a loose collection of smaller mortared together inside what seems to be a frame.

On one level these seem to be contradictions to the integrity and precision of the rest of the stonework.

However the battlements of these castles have required a great supply of stone which necessitated carting rocks from great distances.

However, both castles have been built on battlefields where wars have raged over centuries.

Samurai and foot-soldiers would often not marry so they would save their money for a spectacular coffin, carved from a single piece of stone, which allowed them to be buried where they fell in battle.

So the battlefields where White Crane Castle and Black Crow Castle are built were also massive cemeteries and by default sources of huge, stone coffins. If you wanted to save time and money on building a castle you dug up the coffins, removed their contents, filled them with smaller pieces of stone and set them into the foundations or walls of these castles.

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There can be a profound truth in the image of this.

As Christians we believe Christ is the cornerstone, capping stone, and keystone. Through his death and resurrection, we are given a firm foundation for life; and we are surrounded by a strong wall that is embracing, protecting, and providing a place of nurture.

Himeji (or White Crane) Castle was completed in the early 14th Century and Matsumoto (or Black Crow) Castle was completed in the late 16th Century. Despite hundreds of massive earthquakes and the explosion of two atomic bombs, they continue to stand undiminished.

Christ the head and cornerstone, despite crucifixion and death, burial and resurrection stands undiminished as the one who brings us back from the torment of eternal death; the one whose love knows no limit and whose encircling arms constantly embrace us in nurturing love.

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