



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

May 18, 2008

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:33-43

Future Pastor Preston Heuer

First Lesson: Genesis 1:1-2:3

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 150

Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

### **Christ is Our Cornerstone**

The foolish tenants build on themselves

The wise tenants build on him

This is the day the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

The lesson serving as our sermon text is taken from Matthew 21.

<sup>33</sup> **“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. <sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. <sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (or cornerstone) ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ ? <sup>43</sup> “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.**

The great pyramids of Egypt, the Coliseum of Rome, the Parthenon in Athens, and Great Wall of China. All of these marvelous structures of the ancient world are standing to this day. Anyone looking at pictures of these magnificent structures could point out various reasons as to why they are still here, but the one reason that stands out in my mind is this. They all have a solid foundation.

When someone is building a house, you can’t just start to build the walls and the roof. You need a base. In ancient times, anyone building a house had to start with a solid cornerstone to begin the foundation. That way the walls that were built up around it were both straight and sturdy. If you don’t have a solid foundation, the building will not last. So it is also with us. Christ is our cornerstone. If Christ is not our cornerstone, than we are like the foolish tenants building on themselves. However on the other hand, the wise tenants will build on him.

The day is Tuesday of Holy Week, and Jesus' audience is primarily the Pharisees, but there are also other people there as well. It's hard to imagine that just 2 days before, Jesus was treated like a king by the people of Jerusalem. **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** (Matthew 21:9)

In Jesus parable, the owner of the land built up a grand vineyard. He then rented it out to some tenant farmers to work the land while he was gone. So when the harvest came, they thought that they had a right to the harvest. They believed they didn't have to share or give it up to the owner even though he just rented the vineyard to them. They thought that the land was theirs. So these tenants figured they could keep what they had worked so hard for and kill the servants when they came. The owner wasn't going to do anything about it because he was far away on his long journey. But the owner did do something. **"Last of all he sent his son to them. They will respect my son, he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other. This is the heir. Come let's kill him and take his inheritance."** (vs.37-38)

There are those people who think they don't need Jesus. They believe they know what is best. They believe they have a right to do whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it and no one could say otherwise. These are the foolish tenants of this world. They refuse Jesus and the solid foundation that he brings. The Pharisees were part of this group who reject Jesus. Instead of the solid foundation, they along with every other foolish tenant, decided to build on themselves.

The apostle Paul writes to the Christians of Philippi, **"For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."** (Philippians 3:18-19) Like the tenants in the parable, they only see what is right in front of them. They only see earthly things. They are self-centered. This is the attitude of many people in our world today.

The intern takes a look at the patient's chart in the hallway. He is swelling with confidence that he is able to treat him by himself. After all, this problem seems to be routine and common. He's received the training to treat this problem. So he walks into the room with his chin up and overconfident about his own abilities ready to treat the patient without any help. He was full of pride.

What about us? Have we ever thought that we didn't need Jesus? We might try to deny it. How could we ever deny our need for Jesus? Have we ever really rejected Jesus? Peter said the same thing just two days after Jesus told this parable. On Maundy Thursday when Jesus said that all will fall away because him, Peter in his pride denied it confidently. **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."** (Matthew 26:33) And what happened just a few hours later? He denied that he even knew Jesus and ran away. Peter sinned by letting his pride get in the way. He thought he could stand on his own. He refused to recognize his own weaknesses.

We too fail to acknowledge that we need Jesus. We build on ourselves and by doing so we are sinning. God says to be holy and live perfectly. We cannot live perfect lives.

We, like Peter, have fallen short of God's demands. We are rejecting what God says. We think that our foundation of straw on the sand is good enough to survive in the storms and floods that come. When the waves of our sins come crashing in, we collapse. Our sins catch up to us and we are washed out to the never-ending sea of eternal destruction. **"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, they replied."** (vs. 40-41)

The intern enters that room full of that confidence and pride in his own abilities. He tries one method. It doesn't work. He tries another and another and another. He then tries everything that he could think of to treat the patient, but nothing works. He can't figure out why he can't fix the problem. After all, it was so routine and common. He begins to panic because he can't figure why these methods are not working.

Just as it is foolish to build a house without a solid foundation, it is foolish to think we don't need God. God doesn't just leave us to stand on our own weak foundations. It is wise to build on the solid rock. **"Last of all, he sent his son to them."** (vs. 37) God sent his son, Jesus, to take our sins on himself. Jesus takes all our weaknesses on himself. Now God has forgiven all of our sins. Now we have been placed on the solid cornerstone and that cornerstone is Jesus.

He comes to us and says, "I know your weaknesses. I know you cannot survive on your own. So let me take you to a stronger more secure place." Jesus takes us away from the straw foundation on the sand and onto a higher place providing himself as the rock for the cornerstone. This rock will never fail.

In just a few short days, these people who Jesus was talking to here and the Pharisees would put him to death. They had rejected him as their Savior and cornerstone putting him to death on the cross. But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose from the dead and the rejected stone became the cornerstone. Now we have a foundation that is immovable.

Jesus encourages us to be wise and build on the foundation that he provides. He tells us to bring everything to him. **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:28-29) All of our sins, sorrows, pains, difficulties in our lives, whatever they may be, bring them to Jesus. Stay on the foundation that was he laid and put your trust in him.

That intern is at a loss. He does the only thing that he has not yet tried. So he leaves the room and gets his supervising doctor, asking, pleading him for his help. The doctor walks into the room, taking one look at the patient; he knows exactly what to do. Just a few minutes later the problem is solved. The intern realized that he couldn't do it so he went to the only person who could help him out.

The psalm that Jesus quotes at the end of our text is Psalm 118. The psalm writer pens different word pictures to illustrate that God is always there and how solid he is. Listen to a few of these verses. **"I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my**

**salvation.” (vs.13-14) And the words Jesus quotes. “I will give you thanks for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.”(vs. 22-24)**

It is truly marvelous that we have a Savior who has died and rose for you and for me. It is wonderful that we have Jesus as our solid foundation. With these words we are comforted in the fact that we have a solid foundation that will never be shaken.

There is a children’s song that describes this very well. Perhaps you sang it as a child. One verse goes like this. “The wise man builds his house upon the rock. The rains came down and the floods came up, but the house on the rock stood firm.” With Christ as our foundation, we cannot be shaken. The prophet Isaiah writes, **“See I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”** (Isaiah 28:16) The wind and the waves will come into our lives, but with Christ as our solid cornerstone we can be sure that our foundation will remain steadfast.

The tenants in the parable were foolish. They believed that they could take what did not belong to them. What’s even more, they rejected the Son. They received their just reward. The wise tenants will build on the stone they rejected, our Savior Jesus. They will build on the foundation that will neither shake, nor will it fall.

Eventually the foundations of the great pyramids, the Coliseum, the Parthenon, and the Great Wall will fail, but we have the cornerstone of Christ that will never fail. We ask the Holy Spirit each and every day to give us the faith and the strength to always stay on that foundation. Surely Christ is our cornerstone. On him, our hope we build. Amen And now the peace of God which transcends all human understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds through faith in our Cornerstone Jesus. Amen.