

## First Reading: Acts 4:5-12

*Peter and John had been arrested the previous day because they were proclaiming the news of the resurrection to the people. In today's reading, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit so that he is able to proclaim salvation in Jesus' name to the religious authorities.*

<sup>5</sup>The next day [the] rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup>with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup>When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup>if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. <sup>11</sup>This Jesus is

'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;  
it has become the cornerstone.'

<sup>12</sup>There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

## Gospel: John 10:11-18

*In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.*

[Jesus said:] <sup>11</sup>"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Many of you know that each of our 50 states here in America has a nickname. Of course, we live here in Ohio which is nicknamed the Buckeye State. Many of you know that I grew up in neighboring Pennsylvania and its nickname is the Keystone State. The name was chosen because many thought Pennsylvania was a key part of the early colonies and the formation of this new country of the United States. The Keystone is an important architectural piece to a building and in particular to an arch of a doorway or entrance. The keystone helped keep the whole thing together from a weight bearing standpoint especially before the advent of concrete and other types of mortar. It held each side together and therefore was important for the entire structure. Likewise, when one started to build, the significant part of a structure always began with the cornerstone. As technology advanced, the cornerstone became more and more of a symbolic and historical marker in many buildings - often with a year stamped on them to signify when structure was assembled. What was interesting to me as that when I was writing this sermon it occurred to me that I wasn't sure where the cornerstone was to our church building was, as most churches have the year imprinted upon cornerstone, and so I had stop and go out and take a look around the building, and quite honestly, I was not able to find one, so perhaps that was not a part of this particular facility. At any rate, the keystone of an archway or the cornerstone of a building was an important component to assembling a sure foundation, as successful and trustworthy structure. If the keystone failed, the doorway came crashing down, if a cornerstone was flawed the building was subject to a quicker crumbling.

In our first reading for today, which is not out of the Old Testament during the season of Easter, but instead, the book of the Acts of the

Apostles, that recounts the earliest days of the church reacting to the news that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus had risen; we encounter the disciple Peter who is proclaiming salvation to the Jewish authorities after being arrested. This of course, is the same Peter who just a few weeks ago we heard denying knowing who Jesus even was. Part of his denial, that would relate to any human being, came out of a genuine fear for his life, of being found out as a follower of Christ, and therefore potentially facing the same outcome that Jesus was facing - namely that of being killed – crucified or by other means. It is the same Peter that was in the upper room hiding out for his life once again, when he hears news that the women have encountered an empty tomb. However, the Peter we encounter this morning is a changed man. He is no longer weeping because he denied Jesus; is no longer hiding for fear of been identified as a follower; he is no longer running to find out if Jesus' body has been stolen, or to find out if what the women were saying is true; no, this Peter is a preacher of the Good News of Jesus Christ; this Peter is now the rock in which the church is indeed being built. He was not always the best-looking stone, he was not always the most reliable stone, he was not always the most articulate and understanding stone, but now he was the rock of The Way, the church, the place of good news.

In this particular episode, John and Peter have been arrested for performing acts of compassion and healing others as they proclaimed the salvation given in Jesus of Nazareth. Peter now has been brought before all the officials and this changed man is no longer fearful, no longer timid in his beliefs. Today, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter says to those gathered: ““Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man

has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ The rejected stone has become the cornerstone.

Rejection. Rejection is one of the more common emotional wounds that we experience as humans. If we were to go around this room, right now today, many, if not all of us could tell stories of being and/or feeling rejection. These experiences tend to burn permanent memories in our brains. It could be a rejection that we experienced when we were a very young age, but yet somehow, we would have no problem remembering it this morning. Perhaps we were rejected by a parent, rejected by a partner, rejected by a friend, rejected from a job or contest. Maybe, in some situations, we would even say the rejection was the right outcome in the situation, but more often than not, most of the rejected we experienced we often feel was undeserved, which perhaps is one main reason we hold on to it so long. Actors and actresses often speak of being rejected for certain roles, musicians talk about being rejected by record companies, and there are many other stories of successful people who talk about the moment they were rejected. Often times many people are able to take such occurrences in their lives and use them for motivation, however, there are probably many other stories in which the rejection caused the person to simply give up or quit trying. Studies have shown that when we let rejection enter into our self-criticism and self-worth, it can greatly impact many areas of our life.

The other side of the coin is also self-forming and faith-forming; when we reject an idea, person or situation, it also reveals and shapes who we

are and how we live. The apostle Peter, having rejected any knowledge of knowing who Jesus even was, could have remained stuck in that moment and never allowed himself the opportunity to rejoin the other disciples, let alone encounter the risen Christ. Perhaps the biggest life mistake that Judas made was not betraying Jesus, but rejecting completely any notion that Jesus could forgive him.

In the witness of Christ, rejected by his own people, rejected by those in authority, forsaken by even his closest followers and friends, Jesus comes among them and says: "Peace be with you." The entire life, mission, and direction of the Messiah, as sent by God, demonstrates that God is always working to overcome our rejection of God's concern for our lives, God's presence in our lives, God's hope in our lives, God's promise in our lives. The Bible's story, the Easter story, the Gospel story, the Jesus story, tells us again and again that despite human behavior, despite human reaction, despite human rejection. God comes at us again and again. God does not throw us aside. Even at our worse, even as we kill the one who came to save us, even as today we still act in ways that crucifies God's message for this world, God is not going to give up on us. Church buildings may crumble, congregations may dissolve, church camps may be sold, but God is here to stay. God remains. The rejected stone has become the cornerstone – and will remain the cornerstone. So not matter what we do as the builders, even this day, even this year, we cannot push God away; we cannot undo the empty tomb, we cannot undo the unconditional grace and love of God. And for that, we can say: Thank God! Amen.