

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle B
Acts of the Disciples 4:8-12
Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29
1 John 3:1-2,
John 10:11-18
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Years ago, on Detroit assembly lines, new car bodies were spray painted by hand. Then they were baked in giant ovens to cure the paint. Every time this occurred, runoff from the paint job would pool on the tracks and skids on which the car bodies rested. Layer after layer of this runoff would be baked along with the car bodies. Sometimes the multi-colored slag was baked a hundred times. Eventually, the accumulated paint residue would be scraped off and discarded. Finally, however, someone noticed that the hardened slag could be polished and used to make jewelry. Now the industrial waste product was given a name – “motor agate” or “Fordite.” Painting methods in Detroit have long since changed. No more Fordite will ever be produced, and the dwindling supply is becoming increasingly valuable. So, the slag that the car-builders rejected has become, if not a gemstone, at least something beautiful and valued.

Maureen Briare, the Director of Liturgical Music here at the University of Portland, owns a musical instrument that was once a piece of industrial waste washed up on a beach in Haiti. A discarded oil drum, it was crafted into a finely tuned instrument by a Haitian musician. Now, its crisp, cheerful tones resonate through the Chapel of Christ the Teacher. So, the steel drum that was once discarded, gives glory to God.

These instances are brought to mind by Peter's words about Christ in our First Reading: "He *is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.*" Peter is talking to the Sanhedrin – distinguished, capable men, whose sound judgment was relied upon to keep the Jewish faith alive in the midst of Roman occupation. Yet they somehow managed to reject the one man "given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

It is all too easy to multiply examples in which the people who ought to know best in a given situation prove to be strangely blind. At my senior prom, back in high school, the band was allowed to choose the prom queen. They chose as queen a lovely young woman who few of us had ever paid much attention to. The surprise, even shock, in the room was palpable. It was said that some of the higher status beauties in our class fled to the ladies room, in tears. High school reunions inevitably occasion surprises of a similar kind. The conventional wisdom about who was "most likely to succeed" is routinely overturned. Those who were once rejected, shine.

All these examples serve to caution us against making the same mistake the Sanhedrin made. The conventional wisdom of our own time tempts us to marginalize the Good News of Jesus Christ in our lives and in the world. The implicit assumption is that what really matters are status, power, wealth and privilege. A worldly inclination toward pragmatic cynicism can all too often pass for wisdom, but that way ultimately lays desolation and tears. This Easter season reminds us that it is in Christ that we find hope, peace, beauty and joy, if only we don't stumble over the cornerstone.