



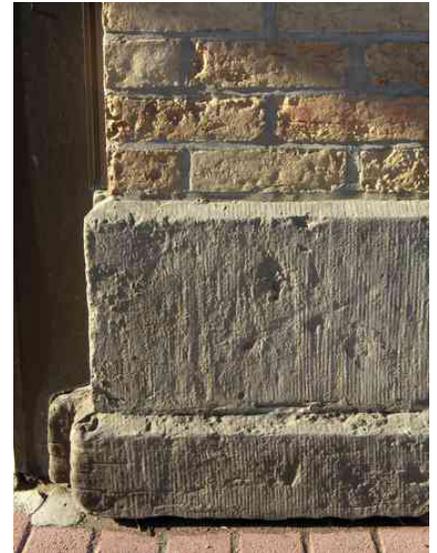
The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing.

Matthew 21:42 has Jesus teaching from the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, where the workers reject the son of the vineyard's owner so they may take the land for themselves. An unthinkable act if they wished to keep their jobs — indeed their lives. Jesus recalls Hebrew scripture: "Have you not heard? 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes (Psalm 118:22-23).'" Jesus calls out the need to always be mindful of God, learning naturally to live peacefully with God's presence. Jesus reminds his listeners of what they already know. As Christians, we know too. We may stumble over our cornerstone — look at it, ponder it, reject it, embrace it, build on it, or leave it sitting alone with no associated structure — but it would be unwise to act as though it did not exist. We must consider how we shall live with its presence.

Cultivating an intentional awareness of God's presence, our cornerstone, is a Christian practice that has its roots in the early monasticism of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. It is not always easy, but is essential to following The Way. It was said about Abba Agathon, a Desert Father, that "for three years he carried a pebble around in his mouth until he learned to be silent." Perhaps this was his way of noticing the cornerstone and learning to be in God's presence more consistently!

The season of stewardship is filled with talk about money: what is needed, what we should do, what the church wants to accomplish, those we serve and the projects we must sustain. It is all of such value. In order to communicate its importance, we make the conversation urgent, loud and grand, perhaps helping us feel our value about our offering. But when we are silent — and I mean really *silent*, with not even internal chatter, arguing, rationalization or justification — we can sense God holding us. The longer we remain in that embrace of unconditional love and mercy, the more deeply we are aware that this grace meets every need the world has. We are aware that it meets every need we have. We are able to give freely from our abundance, sharing that gift with others. Silence is a spiritual practice of relaxing into the stillness of God, noticing grace as a constant presence rather than as fleeting and random moments. It is counter-intuitive in our chatty culture to think that stillness and silence can move us so profoundly, but indeed it is so.

Perhaps the 'pebble in our cheek' teaching of Abba Agathon could serve as a metaphor for the cornerstone in our lives. Let its power cause you to stumble over your words, even silence you. Spend time with the cornerstone in this stewardship season. It will make you strong and you will know what to build — what to give — to make your church and the places in the world for which you are prayerfully passionate, locations where God's grace is stronger through your generous and overflowing heart.



*The Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves
Bishop
The Episcopal Diocese of
El Camino Real*

Reflection Questions

- How do you rest in God?
- How does cultivating the practice of God's presence change you?
- How does God's grace meet you?