

A weathered stone (Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Psalm 31:9-16)

Perhaps the psalmist is referring to limestone, important to ancient civilizations for construction and also as an agricultural and dietary aid.

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Before the “chief cornerstone” in Psalm 118 was seen by Christians as a prophetic word foreshadowing the preeminence of Jesus, it was simply a stone considered unfit for use. Perhaps the psalmist is referring to limestone, important to ancient civilizations across the world for construction and also as an agricultural and dietary aid. Considered a “soft” rock, limestone is composed primarily of calcium carbonate and shares the same basic composition as the shells and coral we find in the sea. While limestone is highly durable, it is also susceptible to erosion from mildly acidic rainwater.

In other words, it is susceptible to weathering. And that susceptibility can cause it to be less than perfect and, in certain situations, to be deemed unusable. In this Lenten season, I’m drawn to thinking about experiences of rejection.

We all share experiences of rejection in our social circles, in our vocational lives, and in our faith communities. Rejection tells us we don’t belong, we didn’t get things “right,” and it can rob us of our sense of identity, purpose, and rootedness if we let it. One might even say that at times, the feeling of rejection is something akin to a

small death in our souls.

But this year's psalms for Palm and Passion Sunday invite us into an expanded story, one that helps us consider the possibility of what awaits on the other side of rejection and even death.

Welcoming new life after death is made possible by the unwavering love of God, which always rises to meet us but especially when we are at our most vulnerable. I'm reminded of newborns and how they require tender, near-constant care. The scope of a parent or caregiver's attention narrows like a tunnel. "Let your face shine upon your servant," the psalmist requests, "save me in your steadfast love." Here, love fuels growth, seeking to meet and nurture every fledgling need, every plaintive cry.

I'm also reminded of the hand-built stone walls so common throughout landscapes in Britain and Ireland. Like a puzzle, arranging stones to fit together and stand firm without the glue of mortar or cement is an intricate process. If, because of its shape, a stone is rejected for a spot at the top of the wall, perhaps it's better suited to serve at the foundation. There are ways in which rejection can point us to a better place, freeing us to experience the purpose designed specifically for us, despite how weathered we might be.

Finally, remembering limestone: I find it wondrous how our very bodies connect us to the earth and all of God's creation. The same material often used for building also provides a home—in shells and coral—for sea creatures, and it is the same basic substance of our bones.

All of this holding up, holding together, and sheltering work weaves us together in an ecosystem that wastes nothing, by a loving God who makes all things beautiful in time.