

**Rock Solid**

**May 14, 2017**

**Happy Mother’s Day!**

**1Peter 2:2-10**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ the Solid Rock on which we stand, amen.

When I was in the Air Force as a personnel officer, part of my job was to review all of the performance reports that went above the colonel level for a general officer’s signature. These performance reports were written on the top‑rated officers and enlisted troops and contained the best ratings and the best word pictures various supervisors from across the base, could muster up. These performance reports were used as part of the promotion system so they were very important to the careers of the people on which they were written. Some of these reports described acts of heroism, selfless devotion to the country and to the mission, as well as courage in the face of danger. I’ve seen lots of metaphors used to describe the best men and women our country has to offer. Occasionally a report would come across my desk describing a person as being rock solid. When I first started reviewing all those reports I thought it was a good thing to be a rock‑solid performer. I soon learned otherwise. Invariably these reports would be rejected. It seemed the general consensus in the Air Force is that being rock solid is not a good thing. Among other things rocks sink to the bottom. A rock‑solid person is someone who, while holding fast to what has worked in the past, was a person reluctant to change, resistant to innovation, and certainly not someone worthy of promotion. A rock‑solid person was someone who used their own past experience to make decisions regarding present day or future situations. A rock‑solid person was thought to be someone who was not willing to take risks. These types of people got in the way of the fast burners who were busy trying to innovate and change the way the Air Force operates. These innovators were the people the Air Force generals wanted to promote, not the tried and true always to be counted on rock‑solid performer.

In the second lesson for today the author of 1st Peter uses the image of a rock to describe what our lives as Christians should be like. We are invited to come to Jesus as living stones that have been chosen by God and precious in God’s sight. These living stones have been rejected by people, just like the person in the Air Force described as a rock was rejected. Rocks do sink to the bottom when thrown into the sea, and they also can become obstacles when they are in the path you are trying to walk on. They get in the way of progress. For the religious leaders in 1st century Judea, Jesus was just such a rock. Jesus came preaching and teaching with a new authority. He proclaimed the reign of God was close at hand and over turned the comfortable lifestyles of the religious leaders. These leaders rejected Jesus, his teaching, his authority, and the salvation he offered as the new high priest. These religious leaders were building their own church and they were not interested in anyone taking over their market share or stealing their place of honor in society. Jesus figuratively became the stone that the builders rejected.

The folks in my story about the performance reports were not bad people. They were hard working and their supervisors thought enough of them to send their reports up the chain of command for the highest level of endorsement. A general officer’s signature is like pure gold when you are in the zone for promotion. The people who build the Air Force rejected the rocks because stones are not flexible, malleable, or changeable (at least not without great effort). Michelangelo once said that inside every hunk of rock was a beautiful sculpture. All he did was remove the outer covering. Inner beauty notwithstanding, rejection is a hard thing to take. Lots of people face rejection at some time in their lives. Maybe it has been a job promotion or even a lay off or a firing. Some have been rejected by the very people who were supposed to love them the most, a spouse or parents. Once rejected in such a way by people that are important in your life you begin to question every aspect of your life. You wonder if you are worthy of even having anything good happen to you at all. After a while even when good things do happen you begin to discount them because you’re convinced you don’t deserve such a blessing.

God sees our pain and suffering in such times of rejection. God had other plans then, and God has other plans now. Our text tells us the stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner. This Jesus who taught in their synagogues, who fed their hungry, who cured their sick has now become the foundational stone of the Church. Jesus is the foundation on which the rest is built. The author of 1st Peter is telling the congregation they are living stones dependent on one another and supporting one another as they become the Church of God. Rock solid people, although rejected, are greatly needed, greatly loved, and used by God to build God’s Church. One of the things that make living stones different from the rock‑solid person in the Air Force is that the Air Force person I described in my story depended on his or her own experience as the basis for action. While personal experience can sometimes be a good teacher, our experiences are tainted by our biases and by our sinful human nature. As living stones in Jesus’ Church, we have Jesus as our cornerstone. Although we support and depend on one another we have Jesus as our foundation. And we have the Holy Scriptures, given to us by God as spiritual milk so we can grow in the knowledge of God’s salvation. As living stones in God’s Church we base our life decisions on something more than our own life experience, something that is solid and true‑on Jesus Christ himself.

Let’s take a moment to focus in on our cornerstone. Looking at Jesus, what do we see? Look beyond the way Jesus was able to silence the critical Pharisees and Sadducees with his wisdom and teachings, look beyond the compassion and the miracles, look beyond the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed for deliverance, but was obedient, look beyond even the cruel beatings he endured, and look beyond the agonizing death on the cross of Calvary. Look inside the tomb. The amazing thing is the tomb is empty! Yes, Jesus was a great teacher, probably the best ever. Yes, Jesus was a great healer, probably the best there ever was. And yes, Jesus was compassionate towards the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the poor, probably more than anyone else ever was. But what separated Jesus from any other rock in the quarry isn’t any of these characteristics. Jesus rose from the dead. He has risen! He has risen indeed and He promised that you would rise from the dead too. Enduring the mockery, the beatings, and the cruel death on the cross, these were all Jesus’ way of saying I love you and I’m doing all this for you because you are precious. Jesus says I choose you, I do not reject you! Jesus promised that his love would sustain you in times of trouble and pain. He promised he was preparing a place for you and that you would rise from the dead just as he has. So, no matter how many times your supervisor rejects you, no matter how many times your friends or family reject you, no matter how many times your teacher tells you that your homework isn’t good enough, you are not rejected. We are not rejected! We are chosen and precious. We are called into a priesthood that is set apart for God’s glory. We have the promise that comes to us directly from the head of the corner that we will never be rejected, and that we will rise with Jesus.

After being rejected a few times in my life I began to wonder if I belonged. I wondered, like some of you, if there was a place for me. I’m not sure when it happened, but at some point, God revealed to me that although in this world and by the standards of this world, I am not a worthy or an important person, but now under the reign of God I am a whole, complete, and blessed. I am important, chosen, and precious in God’s sight. In this world, there is precious little mercy, but under the reign of God there is mercy and grace in abundance.

One person who is never supposed to reject you is your mother. Mothers are people who have an amazing capacity to forgive, but here’s the thing, even the best mother has a mere fraction of the power to forgive that Jesus has. I hope and pray you have all experienced a mother that was and is loving and caring, but the love of parents doesn’t compare to the love of our Heavenly parent whose love never fails. Happy Mother’s day to you all!

May you experience the love and acceptance Jesus intends for all people. May we be the kind of people who love others unconditionally, rather than rejecting others based on human judgments of good and bad, right and wrong. May we not only accept the mercy and compassion of our heavenly Father, but in turn pass on to others what we ourselves have first been given, the unconditional love of our creator, our Savior, and our Sustainer. Amen.