

Cameron Harder shares his research on the influence of the Christian church on people who were going through farm bankruptcy. “Many times I heard Christian farmers speak of having been “abandoned by God” when they lost their farms. One woman sitting beside me on a plane told of watching her parents attempt suicide when their farm failed. She cried, “what did we do to deserve this?” I also heard others whose operations were in the black say modestly when I asked about their success, “We’ve been blessed by God.”

Both the solvent and the insolvent had picked up the belief that there is a direct connection between their financial situation and God’s attitude toward them. A profitable operation was regarded as a blessing from God (with the hidden implication that it was a reward for good behavior or good management). Insolvency was treated as a sign that God has withdrawn the blessing, that one was cursed (probably because of misbehavior).

This sort of religious influence is oppressive in a community. It locks those who are suffering into a prison of silent shame. “The wolf’s at the door, the wall was closing in, and I couldn’t talk to anyone” is how one farmer described it. Paralyzed by fear of the community’s disapproval, many rural people I interviewed who were in financial trouble were unable to ask for the emotional and practical help they needed. Somehow their faith community had failed to communicate the good news that our worth and value as people is given and safeguarded by God’s love for us.

Without that assurance, shame kept those farmers from reaching out for help. It also kept them from sharing equipment with their neighbors or farming cooperatively in other ways, even when it was more profitable to do so. They were afraid of opening their books to neighbors, lest the neighbors spot a weakness and lose respect for them. Some told me that in order to hide their financial problems the husband bought a new pickup truck or the wife bought expensive clothing. They were willing to make their financial situation worse in order to keep up appearances- because they felt that their personal worth was set by their neighbors, not by God.

While this shame-based thinking is common in popular religion, it flies in the face of the central Christian witness. Jesus, the Righteous One, was at various points homeless, unemployed, and ultimately executed in the most humiliating fashion for several capital crimes. Yet God raised him from the dead. P.39

-Discovering the Other: Asset Based Approaches to Building Community Together

So rather than encourage honesty about any struggles in our families and about our lives and our churches, we Christian people have bought into the myth that we are to pretend like we have it all together. We Christian people affirm the theological belief that Christianity is for the winners who have it all together. And we build these perfect churches with perfect people and so we flock to these places of perfection so that we too can keep up the appearances that life is just great with us.

Mother's Day doesn't help sometimes. Being a mother or a parent is not easy. It is very, very difficult. And so many women approach this day feeling guilty that they have not been better mothers to their children. They look to the mistakes that they have made and wallow in self pity.

Social media does not help many mothers' today as they compare themselves to the Facebook postings from others and think to themselves, "look at what my friend Shelly does with her kids? Look at the fun things that my friends kids are doing for them." And it leaves many mother's feeling depressed.

Or maybe we miss our mother's today because we can't be with them because either they have died or they live very far away. We may make a phone call and maybe we will end feeling as though there was something that we want to say that we can't. Or maybe we feel guilty because we want to pick up the phone and our mother is not there for us to call. Or maybe we are trying to care for our aging mother and we are in tension about what to do and we are in a battle now with them over their care.

Why can't our situation be like the situation of our friend who doesn't seem to have the same problems that we have? Why is Mother's Day a difficult day for us while it doesn't seem to be that way for others?

Let's look to the second Scripture today that we have read. We have continued reading in 1st Peter. We are in week 3 of our 6 part series on this letter we call 1st Peter. And in the section we read today we read of the foundation of our faith. The foundation of Christianity. And what is the foundation for our Christianity? As Peter reminds us, Christianity is built upon someone who was rejected.

Come to him, Peter implores, a living stone, but a stone rejected by human beings but precious in God's sight. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Here Peter uses an image which was originally found in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah writes to a community that is about to be defeated but Isaiah tells them that they will be rebuilt. They will have a strong cornerstone.

In writing to his audience of 1st Century Christians who are feeling rejected by God because they are going through a tough time, Peter uses Isaiah's words to tell these Christians that the stone that is rejected becomes the cornerstone of their faith. The rejected Christ is their cornerstone.

Christianity is not about achieving perfection. Christianity is not about maintaining these appearances that we have the perfect family and we are the perfect parent or child. Christianity is not about maintaining a happy face for Mother's Day when we don't feel so happy.

Christianity is about accepting God's grace in our lives. Christianity is about accepting grace in our churches. Christianity is about accepting God's grace in our families.

In the Old Testament book of Hosea, Hosea renames his children as a sign that God will restore Israel from destruction. The name of his child is changed from a word which means "Not my people" to a word which means "you are God's people." Peter picks up on this image in what we have read.

Peter uses Hosea's words to tell his hearers that once they were not a people but that they are now God's people. Once they had not received mercy but now they have received mercy.

Peter tells them that they are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. They are called to proclaim the mighty acts of God who called them out of darkness and into God's marvelous light.

Here in this fellowship of Christian believers we do not have to pretend. We don't have to pretend that we have the perfect family. We don't have to pretend that we have the perfect parents. We don't have to pretend that we have perfect children. We can be sad on Mother's Day. We don't have to pretend that we have a perfect church. Because our families experience brokenness. Our lives experience brokenness. And our church experiences brokenness. And that is OK. It is OK to recognize our brokenness.

It is OK to acknowledge brokenness because the stone that was rejected becomes the foundation of our faith. A rejected Messiah becomes our Messiah.

Since we don't have to pretend we can be real with one another. We can comfort and support one another. We can tell the truth about our brokenness in our lives, families, and church.

But we are not left alone in the brokenness. As we are honest with one another then we can support one another.

And as we are honest about the brokenness in our lives we can give witness to the community that God uses broken people to teach the world about the love of God.

The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone.

We are not rejected. We are being restored. AMEN.

-Text: I Peter 2: 1-12

-Given: May 11, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)