

“The Rock, and Paper and Scissors”
I Corinthians 10:1-4 (The Christ is like a spiritual Rock)

Preached by Carolyn Bohler
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April 18, 2010

Jon Matthews Sings, with guitar, some of the strumming occurs while the Scripture is being read:
Stood there boldly /Sweatin' in the sun /Felt like a million /Felt like number one /The height of summer /I'd never felt that strong /Like a rock
I was eighteen/Didn't have a care /Working for peanuts/Not a dime to spare /But I was lean and /Solid everywhere /Like a rock
My hands were steady/My eyes were clear and bright My walk had purpose My steps were quick and light /And I held firmly /To what I felt was right /Like a rock
Like a rock, I was strong as I could be /Like a rock, nothin' ever got to me /Like a rock, I was something to see /Like a rock

Probably if we recall this phrase, “like a rock” we recall it as much from the Chevy truck commercials as from Bob Seger’s hit song. For more than 10 years, “Like a Rock” was one of longest-running television commercials in history.¹

What made a Chevy truck “like a rock”? Didn’t General Motors want us to trust that their trucks were *dependable, strong, there for us, able to handle anything?*

I confess I have never wanted a Chevy Truck, or any truck, and though I want my car to be dependable and able to handle anything, I haven’t thought of it as a rock.

However, there was a rock in my life that helps me to appreciate the comfort of rock-like dependability. There was a rock at the starting place from which our family used to take hikes. When we approached the end of our hike, tired, we would see “The Rock,” and we would often run to it, knowing exactly where we were—sure that the huge rock had not moved. It was *dependable, there for us*.

Bob Seger may have the copyright on the song, but he was not the first to use “like a rock” *to advertise the comfort we feel in having something that has the features of dependability, strength, and able-to-handle anything-ness.*

The Bible is filled with references to God, like a Rock.

In Genesis God is called “the Rock of Israel.” In Deuteronomy God is “the Rock . . . upright and just.” In I Samuel, “there is no Rock like our God.” We hear in the Psalms, “O Lord my Rock,” “My Rock and my Redeemer.”²

In all those scripture passages, God is said to be “like a rock.” That makes sense, doesn’t it? We think of God’s qualities much like those advertised by Chevy: *God is comfortingly dependable, strong, able to handle anything, and always there for us.*

Jennifer read today the one passage in our Bible in which Christ is referred to, “like a rock.” The New Testament letter-writer, Paul, wrote in his letter to the people in the city of Corinth, “Christ is the Rock.” Paul was making his own connections with the Hebrew Bible exodus story. Paul recounts how God led the Israelites out of Egypt and refers to the rock that was said to give the Israelites water when they were thirsty. He refers to that rock as Christ. Paul makes his own connection between that life-giving Rock and Christ, the Rock.

You see, Paul was rather frustrated with some of the Corinthians. He thought they *could* behave better.³ For his people in Corinth, Paul is saying, God always graciously

provides a way out, an “exodus” from difficult situations--and Christ is that way. Paul wanted the new Christians to know they could take comfort in *depending upon Christ, as strong, and able to handle anything. They could lean on Christ* especially as they behaved better.

Notice, Jesus never called himself a Rock, at least in what was recorded of his words. Jesus *did* say he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus said he was the Bread, the Vine, and the Resurrection. He never said, “I Am the Rock.” But Paul told his new disciples in this letter, as a form of encouragement, “Christ is the Rock.”

FREEZE FRAME. Hold that thought, “Christ is the Rock”; let us *shift gears*. Consider the game, “Rock, Paper, and Scissors.”

I had not given that game much thought until the Professor of Theology at the seminary where I taught, Dr. Andrew Park, started discussing it one day. Dr. Park is a serious theologian, though he enjoys jokes and has plenty of fun. I was surprised he was so interested in “Rock, Paper, Scissors.” For those who play it often, the game is abbreviated, RPS for short.

He explained that the game is used a huge amount in Korea, where he’s from. There it is called Kawi Bawi Bo. He also informed me that Canada has a National “Rock, Paper, Scissors Day”!

I realized that I was missing out on something important.

Rock, Paper, Scissors is a method of “creative conflict resolution.” You just observed that Jon and I were not sure whose turn it was to make the announcements. We played “Rock, Paper, Scissors,” and we easily determined who would start. RPS is not just a way to pass time; it’s really a “Cooperation Tool.”

The apostle Paul would have loved RPS! He could have taught this method of conflict resolution to the Corinthians whom he wanted to behave better. But in a sense, Paul was naming Christ the Rock as a “conflict mediator.”

Conflict is a normal part of life; we will never not have conflict, and it is unrealistic to think that conflict can or even should be eliminated. What we need, what Corinthians needed and we need today, are many creative ways to face and deal with conflict. This game just provides one peaceful, cooperative, in fact, playful way to solve conflict. We could say, and who knows, maybe Paul would agree, that whenever people manage to be cooperative and peaceful in resolving conflict when it arises, they ARE depending upon Christ. . .

For a couple years, I was involved in teaching what was called “Parenting for Peace.” Parents, educators, and researchers studied what increases the probability that children would grow up to be nonviolent problem solvers.⁴ Research shows strong general agreement that three things are most important if we want to nurture people into peaceful ways of dealing with conflict. Though simple, these may surprise us.

1. **Affirm, affirm, affirm . . . and affirm.** [What did I say?] People are much more cooperative if they are confident in themselves. If we want peace, we have to affirm, say good things, about each other. Can you imagine what the world would be like if our leaders would spend a lot of time telling good things about the leaders and people of other countries? Think about how much more you are willing to be cooperative with people who quite naturally affirm and compliment you. Your affirming others helps them to have self-esteem and likely helps them to feel cooperative with you. I don’t think this means we need to compliment

someone about something when we don't mean it. But think of how many times we think something good about another and just don't say it. It may not be too far a stretch to say, "If you want to be 'Christ' for the world now, say it-- affirm another."

2. The second of three crucial ingredients in cultivating peaceful ways of relating is to **surround ourselves with diversity**...The more differences we include in our lives, the more we are likely to really appreciate people who seem different. Sometimes diversity just happens. In Orange County I used to walk around a lake, and as I walked around it on a given day, I easily might hear 5 different languages being spoken. I had never thought of O.C. as diverse, but when I walked I was *passively* enjoying the differences. This set of people who worked to evoke peaceful behavior discovered that it is important to be active in seeking diversity. We need many kinds of photos and images around us; we need to learn many languages, make friends with people of different religions and from different places. An important thing happens--we come to enjoy difference rather than to fear it. Jesus was a man born into a particular culture at a particular moment in history, but the Spirit of Christ, who is "like a rock," is as Chinese as African as Mexican--and when we're with lots of different people, we all tend to realize that.⁵
3. (1) Affirm each other (say good things to each other). (2) Surround ourselves with all sorts of diversity. (3) The third essential ingredient in developing peace in relationships is my very favorite--it's helped me so much in my life: **Make it known that conflict itself is not a failure; it's just part of life.** Conflict happens and will always happen. The great news is precisely that we can practice "Creative Conflict Solving"! What can help us do that is to *trust in Christ, like a Rock. It's really an apt metaphor, for when we're in the midst of resolving a conflict, we may feel that we need to hang on with a lot of strength to what is most solid for us... our faith helps us to hold on through the process of conflict resolution, even with grace.*

I do not imagine Presidents, Prime Ministers and Heads of States of countries sitting around a table playing Rock, Paper, and Scissors--even at the recent nuclear arms summit. However, the game itself has certain elements that we might take note of, when we face any difficult situation with others. First, none of the three--rock, paper, or scissors--is "lesser" or "better." Rock wins over scissors; Scissors wins over paper; Paper wins over rock. All can win; all can lose. All are equal. What matters is what each person *does*. That is, it's a relational game.

I do not want to get carried away; surely, people must fight even over RPS! I can imagine someone with their fist like a rock hitting someone with fingers like scissors excessively hard, for example, or there could be arguments about whether someone waited a fraction of a second, to anticipate what the other was going to present.

Even if we never use "Rock, Paper, Scissors" to solve any conflict in our lives, thinking of it can help us to be more playful, less panicked when conflict arises--for it will. It's comforting to know we can keep attempting to resolve conflicts creatively, on a small scale—with prayer, playfulness, and lots of affirmation.

There is no need to lean on Christ if we don't have a need to lean, is there? **So, whenever we do need something to lean on, as, for instance, when we are faced with**

conflict, then we can take Paul's earnest advice: *lean upon the strength of Christ, who is there for us, dependable, able to handle anything, like a Rock.*

¹ The slogan came from a song by Bob Seger in his 1986 album *Like a Rock*.

² **Genesis 49:24** But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel; Deut 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Deut 32:18 You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.

1 Samuel 2:2 "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

Psalms 28:1 To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.⁷ Isaiah talked of the Lord as the Rock eternal

³ Ex 17:6, I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that people may drink...Moses did....

some make a connection to this

⁴ Parenting for Peace Resources

⁵ The bulletin has an image of a young white welcoming Jesus, the huge statue of Christ in Rio de Janeiro, and a young welcoming black Jesus.