

SERMON: Living Stones

TEXT: 1 Peter 2:2-10

When I was growing up we had a large rock in our front yard. It was probably about three feet tall, four feet long, and eighteen inches wide. At one end, it was a little taller and sloped down a couple of inches to the other end. So, to us and all the kids in the neighborhood, it was the perfect horse. Three or four of us could ride at one time, so it came in very handy when we were playing cowboys and Indians. Little did we know it, but riding the rock was also a tool for us in establishing a foundation in classical music, as we sang the William Tell Overture, put to our own words: To the dump, to the dump, to the dump, dump, dump! And whenever we played tag, or hide and seek, the rock provided a great hiding place, as well as the safe spot, the home base, or ghou, as we called it. (Where that term came from, I have no idea.) If you were touching the rock, you were safe; you could not be tagged out.

When I think about God as our Rock and our refuge, I remember that rock that I played on as a child. Little did I know, I was also learning theology oh so long ago.

There are so many images and stories in the Bible that have something to do with rocks. When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, God quenched their thirst with water from a rock. Jacob used a stone for a pillow when dreamed of the stairway to heaven. When they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Israelites built a memorial made of stones. David used three stones to kill the giant Goliath. Jesus told a story of the wise man who built his house on the rock, and he renamed Simon “Peter”, “the rock on which I will build my church.” And one of the first clues that Jesus had been raised from the dead was that the stone was rolled away from the tomb.

Well, today we heard from the First Letter of Peter, a description of those who believe in Christ as “living stones.” “Come to him, a living stone,” Peter wrote of Jesus, “though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

What are “living stones”? Generally speaking, rocks are cold, hard, dead – well, not even really dead, because you have to have once been alive

in order to become dead. Stones don't move unless something moves them. They just sit there. And in this part of the country, they really become annoying when you're trying to plant something in the yard!

There's another memory from my childhood which many of you will be familiar with. *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* is a classic Halloween television special that's been on every year for the last forty-five or fifty years. While his best friend Linus sits in the pumpkin patch waiting for the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown goes trick-or-treating with the rest of the Peanuts gang. After each house they compare the goodies they received: chewing gum, candy bars, licorice. But poor Charlie Brown, the ultimate outcast, dressed up as ghost with several holes in the white sheet he wears, experiences rejection over and over again. "I got a rock."

All of us have been rejected at one time or another – even Jesus was rejected. He was betrayed by a friend; he was cursed at, laughed at, beaten, whipped, spat upon, crucified. But God chose him to be the cornerstone of all creation. "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, the stone

that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner, and a stone that makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”

All of us have also stumbled at least a time or two in our walk of faith. All of us have disobeyed the will of God somewhere along the way. But the Rock who is God does not give up on us. God continues to call us. God calls us again today to be “living stones,” and to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house. Peter reminds us that “we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” As God’s people our task is to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

If God’s mighty act of salvation, acceptance, and mercy is enough to make “even the stones cry out,” it is enough to breathe new life into cold, hard, lifeless stones like us.

To be a living stone, then, means NOT that we are cold and hard, not that we stone others with our beliefs, but that we as the church **stand firm** on our foundation that is Christ Jesus, the cornerstone. To be a living stone means NOT that we are immovable and unchanging, but that we are strong in our faith, that we persevere in our mission, that we do not run from trouble when others might try to break us down. To be a living stone means that we understand that we are stronger together than we are individually. To be living stones means that we join together to build walls of safety and sanctuary, and that we lay ourselves down like a cobblestone walk of welcome to open the way for others. The building up of the church continues to rely on “living stones” like us.

It may seem like a daunting task, but notice that we don't go it alone. Peter writes, “*let yourselves be built* into a spiritual house.” It is Jesus who does the building, we simply allow him to use us where he will.

One final childhood memory that many of you may share is a little song we learned in Sunday School, that begins with your hands folded and fingers tucked inside. “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people.” But then the song begins with a bit of correction:

“The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is the people. I am the church; you are the church; we are the church together. All who follow Jesus, all around the world; yes, we’re the church together.”

In order to be a spiritual house, the church needs us to be living stones, strong, steadfast, enduring in our faith, willing to be moved and built up and bound together by God. Come to Christ; know that “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” Come together to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

May we be LIVING STONES THAT MAKE A SPIRITUAL HOUSE, to the glory of God!

AMEN.