5-13/14-17 Rev. Amy Haines

1 Peter 2:2-10 Built on a Strong Foundation

Growing up, our house had a gravel driveway made up of many different little stones. One reason I never learned to ride a bike was because I was afraid to fall on that long gravel driveway. Occasionally my sister Jen and I would throw the stones at one another, until we got in trouble. And I can remember as a youngster collecting what I thought was the prettiest stones and lining them up on the windowsill.

20 years ago I was honored to take a class trip to Israel and Palestine…and the landscape was nothing that I imagined it would be. Near Nazareth were gently sloping green hills and farm fields. The Sea of Galilee is really a small lake, with the Golan Heights easily in view on the other side. The wilderness between Jericho and Jerusalem is barren desert hills and caves. Along the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem are many rocks and boulders of all shapes and sizes scattered among the fields.

Jerusalem is a city of stone. Gravestones on the Mount of Olives. Stone walls surrounding the Temple Mount. The cobblestone path of the Via Dolorosa. Everywhere one looks in the old city of Jerusalem there is some type of stone.

Pastor Billy Strayhorn reminds us:

..We've walked or driven on cobblestone. We all know our birthstone. We've experienced milestones in our lives and sharpened knives on a whetstone. We grew up, got a job and put our nose to the grindstone. And now we hope that the Rosetta Stone of our faith, Jesus, will help us avoid the brimstone.

Rocks and stones are a part of our lives. We can use them to build or we can use them to destroy. David used a small stone to defeat Goliath and deliver Israel. …Certain offenses in the life and faith of early Israel called for death by stoning. ...But mainly, rocks and stones have helped us build sturdy homes and protected cities. They have helped us build places of refuge, learning and worship. And those are the images Peter wants us to think about. The positive images of what stones can do for us.

--Billy Strayhorn “Chosen and Precious” epulpit.net

Look around you at the stones and bricks and wood that create the building we worship in today. Although it has taken on several forms through the years, this building has been a place of worship and mission for the people of God for well over 100 years.

Brick or storefront, stone or siding, the church building is only the location through which we learn of the living stones that form the foundation of our faith.

As stated in our Scripture today from 1 Peter, these living stones are the people and relationships that make up the body of Christ in this world that we call the church. Person by person, church by church, generation by generation, we build upon one another’s faith in order that the next generation may know the good news of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

In order to build a strong foundation of faith, today our scripture reminds us that Jesus is our cornerstone. We are to be faithful living stones and claim our calling as God’s own people.

***Jesus is our cornerstone.***

In classic architecture, the cornerstone was the first stone laid upon the foundation, the stone that everything else is built upon and measured against. As the anchor stone the cornerstone sets the rest of the building in place. If that cornerstone is off by even a little, then the rest of the building will also be crooked since the entire building is based upon the chief cornerstone.

In Christianity, Jesus is the cornerstone upon which to build a strong foundation of faith. Ephesians 2:20 declares: “(You are) built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

While we all have our favorite authors and theologians and pastors, from Adam Hamilton to John Wesley to Bishop Palmer, none of them are Jesus. They may all help us make sense of how to live as Christians, yet Jesus is still our baseline.

We gather for worship today from across the political and theological spectrum. Although we come from different backgrounds, and live out of our faith in different parts of the building, so to speak, we all are called to be formed by Jesus.

His word, his love, his ways—they create our strong foundation of faith. Then upon that foundation we are called to build, to build up God’s kingdom in this world through our mission and ministry, our worship and study, our service and our witness.

..In his book, *A Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren tells the story of building a log cabin in the mountains near Yosemite National Park. Warren says:
Even with the help of my father and some friends it took two years to complete, since I couldn’t work on it full-time. When I began building, it took me an entire summer just to lay the foundation. First I had to clear a pad in the forest by cutting down and uprooting thirty-seven towering pine trees. Then I had to dig over sixty feet of five-foot deep French drains and fill them with gravel because the ground was wet from a nearby underground spring.

After ten exhausting weeks, all I had to show for my effort was a leveled and square concrete foundation, and I was very discouraged. But my father, who has built over 110 church buildings in his lifetime, said, “Cheer up, son! When you’ve finished laying the foundation, the most critical work is behind you.” [p. 85]

Rick Warren then comments,

The foundation determines both the size and strength of a building. You can never build larger than the foundation can handle. The same is true for churches. A church built on an inadequate or faulty foundation will never reach the height that God intends for it to reach. It will topple over once is outgrows its base. [p. 86]

--Anthony Seel 3-04 sermoncentral.com

Jesus is our cornerstone—rejected by the world, yet in whom we have our hope. Jesus is our foundation stone—upon which we are called to be built up into God’s people in this world.

***We are to be faithful living stones…***

Based on Jesus as our cornerstone, building upon a firm foundation of God’s Word and God’s ways, we then are to be living stones who together are built into a spiritual house, a vibrant sanctuary, a holy priesthood “offering Christ-approved lives up to God.”

The spiritual house we build is not only a dwelling place for the family of God, but also a temple, a place for God to dwell. Whereas the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was seen as the dwelling place for the presence of God, as Christians God now dwells within us, and when we gather as the church we gather not only as the body of Christ but also to become the presence of God to the world.

.. There’s a story about the king of Sparta in ancient Greece who boasted to a visiting monarch about the mighty walls of Sparta. But the guest looked around and didn’t see any walls, and finally he said to his host, "I’d like to see those walls. Show them to me!"

The Spartan ruler pointed with great satisfaction to some disciplined and well-trained troops, part of Sparta’s mighty army, and exclaimed, "There they are! Those are the walls of Sparta!"

Just as each Spartan soldier was viewed by the king as a brick in his mighty wall, so we are viewed by God as "living stones... building up a spiritual house."
 -- Alan Smith sermoncentral.com 3-99

Have you ever noticed that a stone by itself is simply a stone? Not much can be built with just one stone, even if that stone is one very large rock. Most buildings are stone upon stone, brick upon brick, wall upon wall. Sparta’s great wall was built by row upon row of the army’s finest young men.

God’s spiritual house is not built by just the great men and women of the Bible. Peter calls all who follow Jesus living stones, members together in the body of Christ.

Notice that all of the descriptive metaphors in this passage are plural. We are not called as Christians to a solitary life of faith. From the waters of baptism we are all claimed and called as God’s beloved children, members together in the greater body of Christ, the church universal, regardless of background or denomination.

..Our salvation through Jesus is not just a promise of individual hope but also a call to community. We can remain as random rocks scattered across the landscape, so to speak, or we can belong together to a structure built to honor God, the structure of the church.

--based off of William Loader staff.murdoch.edu.au

As God’s beloved living stones we are called to do more than simply sit. As faithful living stones we are called to share, to love, to live all in the name of Jesus.

For 195 years a Methodist presence has been reaching out with the love of Jesus to the community of Springboro. The living stones of our faith ancestors built churches of wood and brick to be a visible presence to the community that Christ is in our midst. I am thankful for such a foundation of faithfulness upon which we build today.

On this weekend when we remember and honor mothers, grandmothers and many other faithful women in our lives, I am thankful for the faithful living stones who happen to be female who have gone before me to show me how to live and how to serve in the name of Jesus. My mother, my aunts, and my grandmothers were all strong and active women of faith. In my home congregation as well as the musical missionary group my family was a part of I had many adopted mothers and aunts as well as sisters and friends. In college my sorority sisters ranged from Catholic to Presbyterian to Lutheran to Pentecostal. And as I celebrate 20 years in ministry this summer I am thankful for the UMC clergywomen who were my mentors or who paved the way as the first ordained females in West Ohio. I also am thankful for the next generation of clergywomen who are my friends and colleagues, a few who have looked to me as their mentor.

Who are the living stones you honor on this day? They may be mothers or grandmothers; They may be Sunday School teacher or pastors; They may be sisters or friends; They may also be fathers or brothers; They may be leaders or coworkers.

Male or female, older or younger, we all build upon the faithfulness of those who have gone before us, and at the same time are called to build for those not yet here.

***…And claim our calling as God’s own people.***

Centered on Christ as our cornerstone, called to be living stones building up the body of Christ, the church in the world, we are also reminded today by 1 Peter to claim our calling as God’s own people.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people. We are chosen by God, chosen to the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, chosen to be God’s instruments in this world. We are all these and more because we are now God’s people.

How does it feel to be chosen by God? How does it feel to be reminded that you are God’s own people?

Historically these were all terms used to identify Israel, the chosen people and holy nation of God. But in this letter to a persecuted, scattered first century church, these terms are now describing the Christian church. They also can still describe us here today.

We are a holy and royal priesthood.

I love to watch little girls dress up like princesses and pretend to be royalty. Especially in this age of Disney there are many little princess Ariels and Bellas and Elsas in fantasy land. Yet the reality is we are all considered royalty when we claim our faith in Jesus because God calls us all to be part of God’s family. We are all called to be part of God’s royal priesthood, those who are chosen to serve God, to offer to one another and the world the grace and love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ.

We are also a chosen and holy nation.

This chosenness is not so much a sacred privilege as a sign of God’s love. Chosenness according to the world’s standards includes a sense of entitlement and special privilege. So many times in our world today those who are chosen feel they are above others who have been rejected or feel they are entitled to certain perks and privileges. Being chosen of God, however, does not give us special status in this world as much as it calls us to greater responsibility to care for one another and serve our world on behalf of the grace of God and love of Christ.

As God’s people, we are called to a higher purpose—to proclaim the mighty acts of God who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. We are called to share with the world God’s mercy and love as given to us through the grace of Jesus. We are called to proclaim as well as live, to share in word as well as action, our resurrection hope, Christ’s victory over sin and death, and how that good news has made a difference in our lives.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates today’s final verses for our lives today:

“But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work,

chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for him,

to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—

from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.” (MSG)

As living stones based on Christ as our cornerstone, together and individually we have a story to tell of how God has brought us- From darkness into light; From despair into hope; From one rejected to one accepted; From isolation to community; From nothing to something; From no people to God’s people.

Friends, this is good news for all of us here today, good news of God’s mercy, love and grace!

Do you claim it? Will you proclaim it?

Look around you today—we all have a story to tell. Listen to those who have been here for generations as well as those who have only been here a few months—what stories do we proclaim about God’s presence within this community of faith?

Today our Scripture reminds us that in order to build a strong foundation of faith Jesus is our cornerstone. We are to be faithful living stones and claim our calling as God’s own people.

As you go forth from this place today may you continue building, building up your house of faith, building up this community of faith, building up the kingdom of God in this world through your faith and faithfulness.

May it be so. Let us pray.