

SERMON: Living Stones
TEXT: 1 Peter 2:2-10

5-10-20

When I was growing up, we had a large rock in our front yard. It was probably about two-and-a-half feet tall, three 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 nurturing an appreciation of 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.) As long as 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. Looking back, I realize it provided one of my first lessons in theology.

There are so many images and stories in the Bible that have something to do with rocks and stones. 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.” One of the first clues that Jesus had been raised from the dead was that the stone was rolled away from the tomb. Stephen, an early believer, became a martyr, stoned to death for his bold witness and unflinching faith in the risen Jesus.

Today we read 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? We typically think of rocks as cold, hard, even dead. Of course, they're not really dead, because you must have once been alive in order to become dead. Stones don't move unless something moves them. They just sit there.

At this time of staying at home to promote health and healing in our world, it could be argued that we "just sit there" like rocks, because there's nothing else to do. But it is also especially important during this time to remember that we are LIVING STONES. We must allow ourselves to be "built into a spiritual house" because the church building – the physical house for our faith – is closed.

There's another memory from my childhood which many of you will also remember. *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* is a classic Halloween TV special that's been on every year for the last fifty years or more. 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 too many holes in the white sheet he wears, experiences rejection over and over again. “I got a rock.”

“Rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight.” 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 Lord, who is our Rock and our refuge, does not give up on us. God continues to call us, and 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.”

And 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,” as Jesus proclaimed upon his entry into Jerusalem, it is enough to breathe new life into cold, hard, discouraged, and lifeless stones like us.

To be a LIVING STONE and part of a spiritual house then, means that we don’t “just sit there.” We, as disciples and as the church, stand firm on our foundation that is Christ Jesus, the cornerstone. As LIVING STONES, we help to shine the light of Christ in the darkness of these times. As LIVING STONES, we keep our eyes open to evidence of God’s activity in our world, and we proclaim what God is doing with all who have ears to hear. As LIVING STONES, we offer mercy, just as we have received mercy. As LIVING STONES, we understand that we are stronger together than we are individually. As LIVING STONES, we don’t knock each other down, but build each other up. We come together to provide safety and

sanctuary, and 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 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.

Faithful people, come to Christ. Claim your high calling as God's "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 built into a spiritual house... to the glory of God!

AMEN.