

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:2-10

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in scripture:

*"See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

<sup>7</sup> This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," <sup>8</sup> 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.*

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

This morning we return to the scriptures found in 1 Peter. Two weeks ago our focus was on a text from chapter one. At that time, you may recall me telling you that the letter was written for first century Christians who were suffering and being abused and persecuted for believing in and obeying Jesus. The people were under a lot of pressure to give up their faith. Likewise, for us, there are many things that challenge us to surrender our faithfulness to God. If we allow this to happen, he warns us that life loses its meaning and direction.

His encouragement in that portion of his letter was a reminder to the Christians of his day and to us, that God gives and is the substance that we need in our lives to truly live in this lifetime and with the hope of the lifetime to come. This week's text builds on this as he lifts-up the value of the church to our lives and to those around us.

The story is told of a man who was asked by his ten-year-old son, "Daddy, why don't you ever go to church with us?" The father replied, "I don't need to go to church, son. My faith is established." Later that same day the man drove his horses out of the barn and hitched them to the buggy. As he and his son drove out of the barn, the horses became mired in a mud hole. The man tried in vain to extricate them, whereupon the boy observed: "They're not going anywhere, Daddy. I believe they're established."

There are many reasons why people may not attend church; one of which could be that they feel they are "established" in their faith. They feel they have the knowledge they need to live as a Christian. They may feel they don't need to hear more teachings and their time is better spent living what they have learned about what it means to be a Christian, without wasting time by going to church.

Certainly, we are called to live our faith every day; but that doesn't mean we don't need the church. There are some key words in today's scripture reading that should immediately direct our attention towards the significance of the church being in our lives, words like stone, living stones and cornerstone.

Peter addresses all who have an understanding of God, God's will, and the saving grace offered to them through the Savior, Jesus Christ. He appeals to us before engaging in his thoughts on the church, to rid ourselves of all mischievousness or nastiness, and deceitfulness, insincerity, jealousy, and all character assassination. There's no room for this behavior in the church, let alone in the world. Confession of our sin creates an open space for the Spirit to engage one with the truths of the faith. Peter encourages us then, to welcome the vulnerability we may feel in the clearing of that space because that is where God feeds his children who seek and long to grow in their relationship and faith in Him.

Peter immediately presents the heart of his message about the church. He says, "Come to him, a living stone," Christians know who he is talking about here, Jesus. He was pulling this imagery from words Jesus used to describe himself. One such example is found at the conclusion of Jesus' parable of the evil farmhands found in Matthew 21. Do you remember that story?

It's the story of a wealthy farmer who went on a trip, leaving the care of his vineyard to farmhands while he was gone. He sent servants back to check on things and to collect his profits. The farmhands were wicked and greedy and murdered one servant after another that the farmer sent to check on things. In the end, the farmer sent his own son who the farmhands killed, too. At the end of the parable, Jesus cites the text from Psalm 118:22-23, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes."

This text in Psalms, it is believed, originally spoke of Israel's role as God's chosen people, to be the foundation on which God would build His kingdom. Yet as the world rejected this, he reminds them they were still chosen, and they had a purpose. Later, as Jesus adopts this imagery for himself, we know him as the special "Chosen One" sent to save the world from sin, and yet he was rejected.

There are other Old Testament texts like the one in Isaiah 28:16 where we read, "therefore thus says the Lord God, "See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic.'" When this text and others from the OT prophets like this one were written, the prophets were often times addressing Israel's on again/off-again relationship with God. The stone, in this case, was God's unfailing relationship with his chosen people, in spite of their failures. This shows us once again that God has never been willing to give up on his children, so he sent Jesus, the living stone, God's presence living among us.

When Jesus arrives, he is recognized as the priceless and secure foundation stone of God. He is the one who opened the door for us to know God personally. Those who welcome him and build on him are blessed, but those who reject him, who see him as nothing more than a stumbling block, will fall and have reason to fear the future.

There is one other text that I believe helps us in understanding today's text and that involves Peter, himself. It's the story where Peter confesses Jesus as Savior and Messiah. Upon hearing this Jesus tells Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18) This certainly points out that the church is built on those who believe and are faithful to Christ.

When we review these various texts in conjunction with today's reading from 1 Peter, it helps us to understand the role of the church in our personal lives and for the world.

In verse 4, Peter says, "Come to him, a living stone," Everyone is welcome to come and know Jesus. Confessing and repenting of sin, opens the door for finding him, the One who is the very presence of God, who lives and is a part of our lives when we open ourselves to him. Many

in the world will try to convince us to reject him, but those who find refuge in the church, find a different message, a message that invites us to know him more.

Through the church we are reminded that **we** are a chosen people, different from those who reject Christ, and we are precious to God. We find our refuge, along with our brothers and sisters, in a spiritual house, the church. There we are reminded that we are a people always loved and never abandoned. The only way we ever find ourselves alone, is if, we turn from God as Israel often did, but even then, God is faithful and seeks us out for our return to him.

We help one another, encourage one another, because of our corporate bond in Christ to live as God's chosen people, for the mission of leading others to Christ. Chosen by God, we are called to be messengers, working side-by-side with Jesus and therefore, like him we become living stones, taking God's living presence and Word into the world.

Peter teaches us that through the church we are called upon to live as a royal priesthood. Christians are a holy priesthood. We are holy people, likened here to a priest, a person connected intimately to God, made possible because of Jesus, and who has a job to bring others to God. Like a priest, we make sacrifices, spiritual sacrifices, however, often witnessed through our commitment to worship and serving others.

The church as a priesthood of believers seeks to call out and use the many gifts and talents from within to accomplish the will of God. The apostle Paul likens the use of our corporate gifts to that of the body, where there are many parts, all serving a purpose to allow the body to function, thereby giving it life. Bringing our God-given gifts for use through the ministries of the church, brings vitality and power to the mission God has called us to, for building His kingdom. Together we bring the church to life as a beacon that leads the way to God.

Let me remind you on this older adult Sunday, that we are never too old to use our gifts. Every older adult has wisdom and experiences they accrued over time that can help as a piece of the foundation of the church and help guide the church in this ever-changing world. There is no mention of a retirement age anywhere in the Bible; in fact, we find the opposite, we find many examples of older folk doing marvelous work as agents for God's mission. It may look a little different than it did in our younger days, but our work is never completed.

Many of us have been inspired by Miss Elly's faithfulness in proclaiming God as the ruler of her heart. Even after looking death in the face and yet remaining in this lifetime, she can say, "I guess God wasn't finished with me yet for the work, whatever that may be, in this lifetime." Sure, her physical limitations prevent her from physical activities, but her spiritual health is an inspiration as she proclaims God as a living presence in her life.

I could tell stories of many others who could have thrown their hands in the air and claimed that they are no longer capable of, or no longer possess gifts for participating in the work of building God's kingdom. But let us not forget, that we do not need to do the work of God alone. Through the church, we can work together, each doing our part as we are able.

No one should be expected to carry, nor should anyone assume total responsibility for the full load of any one project or ministry of the church. Some of us like to do that, maybe because we feel it's just easier to do ourselves. Or, because we become possessive of a ministry and want to make sure things are done to our liking. Things get done, great things are accomplished when we all do our part, **AND** when we allow others to use their gifts.

Yet, let us not forget first and foremost, that Christ is our cornerstone. The cornerstone in Jesus' day served a more important function than it does today. The cornerstone really was the one piece on which the rest of the house was built. If the cornerstone were not set right then the

rest of the house would not be square and would not stand the test of time. The cornerstone determined the character of the whole house.

Yes, Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, and the people who make up the body of Christ know Jesus and continually seek to know him better. He is their foundation, the foundation on which the church as a unit is built, the true church, becoming as Jesus was, “living stones.”

Those living stones are ordinary people like you and me, greatly valued by God and therefore, chosen by God, built together into a holy spiritual house and commissioned to take his living presence to the world, to shine light where there is darkness, to share compassion where there is loneliness and abandonment, to spread love where there is hatred and indifference.

I found this thought provoking piece about the church that I would like to share with you in closing. This is my church. It is composed of people just like me. It will be friendly if I am. It will do a great work if I work. It will make generous gifts to many causes if I am generous. It will bring others into its fellowship if I bring them. Its seats will be filled if I fill them. It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service. If I who make it what it is, am filled with these, Therefore, with God’s help, I dedicate myself to the task of being all these things I want my church to be. Amen.