

Your Spiritual House

July 16, 2017

1 Peter 2:4-12

I love stones. I know it may sound odd, but around my house I'm not too fond of grass. I love stones because they keep down the weeds and are virtually no upkeep. When we first moved in, someone gave us their rocks that were too big around their pool and that's when I discovered rocks. I'm a city kid, why do I need extra grass or flower beds. And you know I'm so cheap, that there were old beds of small rocks around rose bushes in my yard that we tore out the rose bushes and I by hand dug up the river rocks to save them. This summer we've been all about rocks because we had to redo a section of our deck and our pool and we've moved all those rocks and in fact bought more.

We often don't think of stones as very useful. They lay around in our fields, in our yards they chop up our lawn mowers but stones and rocks in fact have been incredibly useful over the millenia. Rocks make the foundations of our homes. Before aircraft and parachutes, they've been used as walls to keep civilizations safe as in the Great Wall of China and the walls around Jerusalem. Rocks built some of the most beautiful churches in history. We use them in our gardens to cut out weeds and then you can't forget the fun as a kid of skipping stones in ponds.

Our religious history, stones play a strong part in helping us to understand our faith. In the Old Testament, God is often referred to as our Rock. In fact, almost all of the uses for the Hebrew word Rock in the OT are just for God. When we hear God as our Rock, it gives us an impression of our God who is unmovable and solid and safe in our life. The landscape of Israel is littered with stones. When Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Pharisees want to silence the people from praising Jesus and he remarks that if the people are silent, 'the stones would shout.' (Luke 19:39) Now for the stones to shout in Jerusalem, that is a loud cacophony of shouting.

The name Peter in Greek means Rock. And when Peter finally declares that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus responds by saying, "Peter upon this rock I will build my church." Peter is our rock that begins our lives together as Jesus' very people and we are held together by our faith in our Rock and planted upon the rock of our foundation. There is power in rocks. They bring security in walls, a firm foundation to build anything, including the very church. And in today's scripture the idea of Peter as our rock is taken one step further as we too are described as living stones. READ 1 Peter 2:4-12.

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. ⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. ⁶ As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."⁷ Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone."⁸ And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. ⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."¹¹ Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. ¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.

Our scripture begins with a powerful statement in v. 4. ***You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.*** Again, another stone image. Jesus is described as our living cornerstone. 1 Peter is concerned with who believers will become as persecution rises in the Roman world. Persecution is on the rise and the believers are being scattered and hunted. Peter in this letter wants to remind them and us who we are as the church. We are a firm building. Now of course I know very little about building, but apparently the very first stone is the most important. It has to be laid just right or the building will become shaky or lean or just plain fall down. i.e. the leaning tower of Pisa! And as we are being built into the church, Jesus is that very most important cornerstone. He is of course perfect and firm and will never cause us to lean. He is the Rock of our Foundation. When the winds come and the storms or tornadoes swoop around, we are built on the firmest foundation possible because Jesus is our living cornerstone.

OUR FOUNDATION IS JESUS.

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. (1 Peter 2:4 NLT)

Because Jesus is our cornerstone, God wants to see us being built into a church – a spiritual temple as this scripture describes. V. 5 is one of my favorite verses in all the scriptures. ***And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.*** I just love that description of who we are – living stones. We are so firm in our faith, so grounded and so functional in the world. This scripture is telling us to have a living faith – to be a stone that has an amazing purpose in this world. Just as stones create the most beautiful architecture you've ever seen – allow your faith to grow and build and show the amazing building of God in this world.

In ancient Judaism the Temple was the center of the faith. Faith revolved around the very building of the Temple. It is still crucial in Judaism and you see Jews from around the world make their pilgrimage to the Wailing Wall, the last vestige of the original Temple, the only wall that still stands. Because the Temple was where God resided and was the key to their faith as the actual home. Peter here is exploding that idea. Now we don't need one single building in the entire world, no each and every faithful believer who makes up the church is that very building. Believers combine together to make up the living stones that creates the temple in all the world. And so in this passage we are to be those living stones. Interlocking together to be alive with the faith and making Jesus known throughout the world. God no longer resides in one building in Jerusalem, instead God resides in each of us and we are to make him know as living stones. The idea of living stones as who we are takes me back to Jesus' words about the stones would shout and reminds me of how many stones there really are.

WHEREVER WE GO WE ARE LIVING STONES.

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. (1 Peter 2:5a NLT)

Yet, that's not often how the world experiences Christians and the church. We are seen in the media spewing words of hatred and protesting. Did you know that surveys of servers at restaurants hate the Sunday breakfast/lunch shift? That's right the worst tip day of the entire week is of the Christians who just get out of church and go for late breakfast or lunch. Imagine that, the service industry doesn't like serving us because we are known as stingy. And here is a great sadness – the most segregated hour of the entire US week is 11:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings. The time when Christians come together and worship – we worship separately because we perpetuate hundreds of years of oppression and racism. These are not flattering statistics of us and the church. And not at all what Peter is describing when he

wants us to be living stones – as living stones of the temple, we are to be the holy priests that offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

Now in the ancient Temple, only the priests could encounter God and offer the sacrifices of the people. Sacrifices were brought by the faithful and the priests offered them to God. Because of Jesus, Peter is describing here that we are all now priests, we could translate that as servants, of the Lord. And our spiritual sacrifices are our actions in this world that float up to heaven in a sweet aroma. Our actions, our living faith – those living stones, are the sacrifices that God desires.

LIVING STONES CHANGE THE WORLD AROUND US.

What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. (1 Peter 2:5b NLT)

We know that if every person in this world who professed and confessed Jesus Christ as their Savior actually lived the faith 100% of the time with 100% of all we've been given – wow, we could change everything. We truly could be living stones that build amazing beauty in this world. Statisticians have actually calculated that if everyone in the world who said they were a Christian gave the tithe, 10%, we – the church, the living stones of Jesus Christ – could eradicate world hunger and still keep doing everything plus every vision we have in our local churches. Imagine that – if we just gave what is the biblical standard of minimum – the living stones of Jesus could eradicate hunger.

And now imagine if we each gave an extra 10% of our time each week in hands on service to Jesus how we could change the world around us. Now if you calculate an average week, less 8 hours a day sleeping and 40 hours a week working, that's 7 hours each week serving God. That's one hour a day. Or exclude worship and LifeGroup and that would be only 4 hours a week that we give in a ministry. Now times that by the millions of living stones in the world and wow, what could we accomplish. That's what Peter is seeing when he writes, ***for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*** (1 Peter 2:8-9 NLT)

So here is our question for this morning, how do people know in our community that we are a spiritual temple. If CrossPoint stopped existing today, who would miss us in ...

Rocks are so often perceived as dead. They destroy farmers plows if they are caught in the field. If just laying on a road and kicked up by a truck they can destroy a windshield. When not used correctly, rocks are just there – sometimes an eyesore, sometimes a nuisance and sometimes dangerous. And yet if used correctly, rocks can build such firm foundations that they survive hurricanes or tsunamis. Because Jesus is our firm foundation, we are to be that living stones in this world serving Jesus Christ. We are God's very Temple.

And so our challenge is to be known in this community. To be such an alive and firm building that the rest of the township knows who we are. To thank the person at Giant who helps you bag your groceries after church and present them the love of Jesus Christ. To give a 50% tip at breakfast or lunch because you know the love of Jesus and appreciate someone who just served you. To go to the South Hanover fundraisers for the Fire Company – and be present and let the entire community know that CrossPoint is grateful for their service and sacrifice. ...

And here's the thing, Peter ends this section highlighting how our stones in this world have impact. In a way, we are always under a microscope. People do see how we act and it impacts their faith and their lives. Servers don't like to work on Sunday mornings, not because they are taking off on the sabbath, but

because we Christians have an impact and it ain't a positive one. When we are living stones, our actions not only change the world they have the opportunity to spread the gospel. Peter says it in this way, ***Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.***

Do you hear that last bit? They will see your honorable behavior and they will give honor to God. Our actions matter because they are reflecting the God that we love. Our actions and our living stones have the ability to Make Disciples. So these actions in this temporary moment, have eternal consequences not just for ourselves but for those with whom we interact.

LIVING STONES SHOW GOD'S WORD TO OTHERS.

Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.