



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 20, 2008
5th Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 2:4-10
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 17:1-12
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 33
Second Lesson: 1 Peter 2:4-10
Gospel: John 14:1-12

Every Christian is a Priest

As I was growing up, I heard my dad say a lot of phrases over and over. He repeated some of them quite frequently. And one I heard him repeat fairly often is one that he would say to us when we screwed up. When we did something wrong, he would say, "What's the matter with you? You got rocks for brains?" I heard him say it to my sister a lot. I heard it a lot too. It was just his way of telling us, "Think before you act." But no one likes being told you have rocks for brains, right? It's not a nice thought. No one would like that if they would say that to you, but he was teaching me to remember to think before I act, which is a good lesson for all of us to learn and to take to heart.

But our God comes to us this morning and says something more than you just have rocks for brains. He says "You are nothing but a rock," right? Did you notice that when he said that to you? He said to you this morning "You are a living stone." That's a fascinating phrase, isn't it? You are a big stone, but you're not just any stone. You are a living stone. Pet rocks might have been a craze, but you never really had to feed them much because stones don't live, right? You and I, spiritually, have as much chance of being alive as that stone does because we are spiritually dead. We are spiritually bankrupt. We have nothing to offer to God to make him love us. We can't become spiritually alive. We are enemies of God. We want nothing to do with him on our own. But the fact that we are now living stones is a reminder to us that God has done the unimaginable. God has done the incredible. He has taken spiritual stones like you and me and made us alive in Christ Jesus. And every Christian, he tells us, is a living stone.

As living stones, we are being built by God. We are being built by God into a spiritual house is what he tells us. As individuals we are being built and as a congregation we are being built by God. He tells us it is for a very special reason—so that we can offer spiritual sacrifices. We are being built by God so that we can live for God, so that we can be faithful stewards or faithful managers of everything God has entrusted to us. That's why God has made us spiritual stones, living stones.

Peter had just talked to the people that were scattered and were facing this persecution and were tempted to go back to their pagan roots. He had talked to them about the purpose for suffering that we looked at last week. Then in the verses right before what I read to you a little bit ago, he said "Suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, and hope doesn't disappoint us." That's what we looked at last week. But then he said, "*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good*"

(1 Peter 2:2, 3). The way the Lord strengthens us so we can face persecution is through pure spiritual milk, which is the message of the gospel—that Jesus lived and died in our place and took away our sins.

Then he bridges from that to what we just read. “Now that I’m talking to you about” basically he says, “about craving pure spiritual milk, this is what God is doing as you drink the pure spiritual milk of the gospel. He is building you up as living stones to be the spiritual house that offers sacrifices to God.” Peter is beating one steady drumbeat in this section of his letter to the Christians he was writing to. And that steady drumbeat is the Word of God. It’s the gospel. Be in the gospel. Be in the spiritual milk. God builds you into living stones through the Word. And to show that, to put that into practice, he quotes all these different passages from the Old Testament, from the Psalms, from Isaiah that you saw in the back of your service folder that are in italics. Those are all passages that he is quoting. He is using the Word of God, that pure spiritual milk, to build them up.

As he points them through these passages, he points them not to themselves as their foundation. He points them to THE living stone. Just like Jesus said he is the living bread and he is the living water, “he is the living stone” is what Peter says who heard those phrases and heard them explained by Jesus—the one who gives life to those who were stones. He was dead and now he is alive. He died for our sins, but he rose again and as the resurrected Christ, he gives us spiritual life.

And then to show how clearly it is that it is only Jesus that does this, he uses a couple of other stone images, right? “Jesus is the cornerstone,” he quotes from Isaiah. “I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and when you trust in him, you are never put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:6.) Jesus is our cornerstone in the sense that the cornerstone was the stone that everything else in the building had to be straight in line with. If you laid the foundation and your stones were wavering all over the place as you laid the other stones, your foundation wouldn’t be good and your building would crumble. If you and I try to build on ourselves, and the fact that we try hard, or we do good therefore God must love us, our stones are wavy. We are not in line with Christ. We are going to lay on a spiritual foundation that will crumble and develop cracks and fall apart very quickly. The only foundation that can be laid is the one that has already been laid. God tells us that in Scripture, and that is Jesus Christ—his life in our place and his death in our place.

He also tells us that Jesus is the capstone. The capstone is the stone right at the middle at the top of an arch. It was wedge shaped. If that stone wasn’t there, the rest of the arch would come tumbling down. It would all fall apart. In your spiritual life, in my spiritual life, in any Christian’s spiritual life, if Christ isn’t the thing that is holding us all together, what he has done for us, if we are going to rely on ourselves or anything else, if we are going to rely on the law instead of the gospel, everything is going to come crumbling down at our feet. That is what our God is telling us, that as God builds us into this spiritual house, he does it only through the message of Jesus—his life in our place and his death in our place. If you try to build in any other way, you are going to have problems.

God says he is building us so that we can offer spiritual sacrifices. That's our life of service to God. If you take the time after church to look at the posters that our children drew, you will see all different kinds of spiritual sacrifices. You will see some having people sing. You will see some with people by the Bible. Our janitor told me there is even a vacuum on one of them. You will see all different ways of spiritual service that we can offer up to God.

But the same thing is true, if we try to offer up our service to God apart from building on the foundation of Christ, it is going to crumble. It's going to fall. But we would never do that, would we? In congregational life I really believe we are tempted to do this very often.

When you hear the word "stewardship," the first thing that probably comes to your mind is finances, right? You think that is all pastor is going to talk to us about today. Finances are one part of our time, our talent, our treasure, our temple that we use to serve God. But I think it's the one area where we are most inclined to slip back into using the law instead of the gospel to produce results. When things fall behind, we say "we have to get out there and let those people have it and whip them into shape," and we aren't talking about loving them and hugging them with the gospel. People are often talking about beating them with the club of the law and "should-ing" all over them. That's a foundation that is going to crack and crumble.

The only foundation we can build on to produce the fruits of faith, the only thing that produces the fruits of faith is faith. The only foundation of faith, God has told us, is Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. The only thing that will produce those fruits of faith in a God-pleasing way is the gospel of Jesus Christ—that we do things because God loved us first. That at times takes patient and gentle and ongoing instruction and teaching, just like we do with our children. We have to tell them the same things at times over and over, right? And they still don't hear it. That's how you and I are at times in our life of serving God. God has to say things to us over and over and point us back again and again to the love he has shown us in Christ so that we begin to serve him with our time and recognize that our time is ALL of the our time, not just the part when we are doing what we consider "God stuff," but every day of every minute of our life we are offering a spiritual sacrifice. We are either offering it faithfully or unfaithfully, but we are living in a way that reflects our love for God—either well or poorly. Every moment of our time we are stewards. We are offering spiritual sacrifices.

We offer spiritual sacrifices by declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We do that at times with words, but we often do it without words. People around us that know we are Christian, they see whether or not we live what we profess. And when you and I fail to live what we profess, and we will fail because we are sinners, it puts up a stumbling block between us and them and between them and the One who took away their sins. So what is important for us to show them is not that we are perfect and we never sin because that is not going to happen. That's just setting yourself up for a fall. What is important to show others is how we, as Christians, deal with our failures. We don't make excuses. We trust in the precious cornerstone so that we are never put to shame. We don't make excuses or

rationalizations, we just simply say, "I was wrong. I hurt you. I am sorry. I hope you will forgive me and I know that my God has forgiven me in Christ."

As we offer the spiritual sacrifice of living our faith, it will touch people and the Spirit will give us the opportunity to declare God's praises, to say why we do what we do so that the people that are out there who have rejected that precious cornerstone will be lead by the Spirit of God to believe that Jesus lived and died in their place, that their sins are forgiven, that heaven is open to them. That's why we serve as stewards.

Yes, we fail, but when we fail, we can go right back to those incredible words, "Once we were not God's people, once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God because Jesus lived and died in our place. Once we had not received mercy because we were separate from God. We were unbelievers. But now we have received mercy, so we live in that mercy." (1 Peter 2:10.) When we fail as stewards, we don't beat ourselves up over it. We say, "Lord forgive me and help me to do better in the future."

And because he has loved us with an everlasting love, we want to do better in the future. And the more we are connected to his Word and his Sacraments, the more we will do better in the future because we are "living stones."