

Date: January 10, 2010

Title: Using Living Stones to Build a Living Church

Scripture: 1Peter 2:4-7

1 Peter 2:4-7 (NLT) 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. 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."

BEGIN SERMON WITH SLIDE SHOW OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

Place various stones in places on the altar and on some of the pews.

How many of you found the stones that are sitting on the pews? Did any of you sit down on the stones accidentally? If you did, I'm sorry about that. I hope no one hurt themselves.

I put those stones there as a way to call attention to the scripture for this morning. In this passage Peter is talking about a building process. People have been using stones as a building material for years. If you have ever been to Mesa Verde you have seen the way stones were stacked up one

upon another and then mud was stuck into the cracks to keep the wind and weather out of the crude buildings. I've never seen the Mayan ruins in person, but they also used stones to build some remarkable structures.

The building process to which Peter is referring involves a construction technique where the builder puts one fairly large stone at the corner of where the building is planned to be and then all the other stones are lined up according to that one. The first stone is called the cornerstone. These days when you think of a Cornerstone, you probably think of a big ornamental stone that is prominently displayed in the corner of a building, but what Peter is talking about is a much more practical stone – more of a reference stone.

How this would likely have taken place is that the builders would have gone out into the field where there are a lot of stones and they would have begun picking up stones that would serve as materials for the construction of their building. The cornerstone would have been a special stone that had just the right angle and size to use for the purpose of reference for the building. The builders would have looked closely at every stone to see which one would work the best for a corner stone. Once that stone was selected and put in place, the rest of the stones would be stacked in place to build the foundation for the building. If the building was going to be 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep they would take all their measurements from that one stone.

At the time Peter was writing this I'm sure there were buildings of various types being built. I'm guessing that just like today, there were homes being built and perhaps some barns or stables. There may have been some military and political buildings being built for the roman government officials. There may have been some stores being built. But here is the funny thing. There almost certainly were no Christian churches being built

at that time... that is no Christian church **buildings** were being built. When Peter was writing this letter, the relatively few Christians of the time met for the most part in people's homes.

Isn't that interesting? Peter is using this metaphor of a building technique talking about how the church should be built with Jesus as the reference point for everything the church does, but with very few if any exceptions, there were no church buildings being built at that time. All of the church buildings that I showed at the beginning of the service came well after Peter's time. It really wasn't until the church was well established that people came up with the idea to build a building to meet in. Peter was writing about building a church, but he wasn't writing about building a church building.

Now, don't misunderstand me, the church that Peter was writing about was very much alive and growing. In fact the church to which Peter was referring is still alive today. It is the church that we are striving to be a part of today. It was the church that began with Jesus as the cornerstone and began to grow from there. And, rather than bricks and mortar or fieldstones, the church Jesus started was built from generation to generation with *living stones*. That's what Peter said, "*You are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.*"

What do you think? Do you feel like a living stone? Or do you feel more like the stones I brought in from outside that are sitting next to some of you on the pews? I know that for quite a while I felt more like those cold dead stones than like one of the living stones Peter was writing about. I guess that's why I left the church when I did. I mean, for a while it seemed like all I did was come to the church, sing a few hymns with words I really didn't understand, and listen to someone talk about things that didn't really mean

much to me. When it came to finding meaning and purpose from my church, I really was no more alive than one of those rocks sitting next to some of you. Actually, if you want to know the truth, it wasn't just at church that I felt lifeless, I frequently felt that way at work and at home. When I was in high school, one of my favorite songs was, "I Am a Rock" by Simon and Garfunkel.

I use to wonder about this quite a bit. I actually spent quite a bit of time trying to figure out how to get more meaning in my life. But I think that I know now why I often felt more dead than alive. It was because I was like those builders that Peter was talking about... the ones that rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their idea of what Messiah or savior or the Son of God should be like. I'm not sure what I thought the Son of God should be like, but I sure didn't think it was Jesus. Now, the funny thing about this is that I hadn't really read the Bible for myself. I hadn't prayed or asked God to go to work in my heart. I was pretty much just muddling through life. It's really no wonder that I was more like a dead rock than a living stone.

I bet I'm not the only person in this room who has had this experience. In fact, I bet there may be some of you in here today that are feeling more like the dead rocks on the pews next to you than like the living stones that Jesus used to build the church way back in Peter's time.

But, you know what is really wonderful about the God we serve. The God we serve is able to give life to even the most worn out depressed, and downtrodden of persons. The God we serve is able to give sight to the blind, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and set the captive free. Our God is able to turn everyday people like you and I into holy priests... living stones which are the building materials that God uses to build the only church that really matters.

Some would say that we can do nothing on our own behalf to become living stones. On some level, I agree with them. But I believe that we do have some responsibility to make ourselves available to God's saving grace. We do have a free will and we can choose to orient our lives according to Jesus' purpose if we will. And when we begin to live our lives more according to God's will using Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives instead of our career or our possessions or some other earthly pursuit, then we find that God begins the work of transforming us from dead rocks to living stones. And when we become living stones, we become a fitting building material for the church that Christ began centuries ago; the church that Christ is still building today.

SHOW THE CHURCH BUILDING SLIDES AGAIN HERE

There have been some pretty amazing church buildings built down through the years. Many of them have been built to glorify God with their inspirational architecture. Many have been constructed as simple meeting places where God could be worshipped. But from the simple to the dazzling, the only thing that has really mattered all along is the people inside that church. I've never met most of the people who built and attended most of the churches I've shown on the screen. But I'm guessing they were like most churches. Some were alive and vibrant with Jesus as the obvious cornerstone of their lives; others being transformed by God's grace from dead to alive, and others going Sunday to Sunday – season to season more dead than alive.

Even though they went through the motions of getting to church regularly, their lives were aligned with some earthly thing that had little to do with

Jesus. Apparently they just didn't realize how incredible life could be if they would only let Jesus be the cornerstone of their lives.

You may not realize it, but even though this church was founded in 1912 and even though the people of this church have been worshipping in this building since 1970, we are still building a church here. We like the millions who have gone before us are going through the process of becoming living stones. This side of heaven we'll never complete that process. We can always find dead places in our lives that Christ can transform and bring to life. But when take the unique and beautiful life that comes from aligning our lives with Jesus and then combine it with the lives of others who have also been transformed by Christ living in their lives, God can take these living stones and, as Peter says, use them to build a spiritual temple.

And that is what we are all about here. We are doing all we can to let God transform us into living stones so that with Jesus as the cornerstone, we can be assembled and used according to God's purpose to be a part of God's living and holy church. We call ourselves First United Methodist Church of Fountain. We meet at 1003 North Santa Fe in Fountain with about a hundred people every week. But the church we are building began 2000 years ago and is much bigger than we can even imagine. Its reach and influence stretches across the globe and throughout eternity. For you see, we are not just building *our church*. We are building *Christ's Church!* And the more like living stones we can become, the more our church will be ***Christ's Church!*** Amen.

