

Living Stones

I Peter 2:2-10

May 1, 2005 Confirmation Sunday

Today our Bible reading suggests that God is like a contractor, like someone who builds a building. As any engineer or an architect who designs a structure, God has a vision of what God wants to build: a community of people faithful to God. The church is not a building, it's a people. Let's see how God goes about building this spiritual house.

God chooses a cornerstone. A cornerstone is a central piece of a stone structure. It forms part of the foundation which holds all the other stones together and unites them. God's cornerstone is Jesus. Once it is set in place, the cornerstone sets a pattern for all of the other stones to follow. Jesus offers us his life as a pattern for our lives. The cornerstone forms the foundation, and if it is removed, all the other blocks will fall and the building will be destroyed. When the church tries to exist without Jesus at the center, the church often falls into fights or falls apart.

To the cornerstone are added living stones. Most stones I know aren't living. I've not felt a stone breathing or pulsating. The living stones the Bible is talking about are people. Jesus calls other people to join his ministry. They are living stones to be joined together around Jesus, the cornerstone to form God's household. We are those living stones which compose the household of God.

The glue or mortar that unites the living stones is the love of God. You notice that these stones are not rectangular bricks that fit together neatly like Lego bricks. The living stones of God's household come in all kinds of sizes, shapes, and colors. They won't fit uniformly on top of or beside one another. We need lots of love glue to hold us together.

When all the stones are in place, it is a beautiful multi-colored household with all the living stones working together, supporting one another, worshiping together, and learning to love one another. The living stones all look different and have different functions, but each and every living stone belongs. No one is excluded. In fact, if anyone is left out, the community is not complete. There will be a hole, a broken window, a leak in the church.

It looks like a huge family reunion with grandparents and babies, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, dozens of cousins, all related to the one parent of us all, God the Creator. It's a place where everybody belongs, even the quirky old uncle and the squirrely little kid. Every living stone is precious in the household of God.

One day when Francis of Assisi went to pray in the crumbling chapel of San Damiano, he heard the figure of Christ on the cross say to him, “Rebuild my church.” Francis took Christ’s words quite literally, and set himself to the task of rebuilding the chapel. Gradually he was joined in his life of poverty, prayer and preaching by others whom he welcomed as brothers. Thus was born the order of Friars minor, a brotherhood of those who identified themselves with the least on the social scale of 13th century Italy.

What Francis came to understand as his brotherhood grew, was that Christ’s call to rebuild the church was not about finding stones with which to rebuild San Damiano, the little chapel. Christ’s call was about living stones, flesh-and-blood stones, with which God was building a spiritual house. His growing brotherhood, made up of those of high and low degree, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, was a collection of stones of different shapes, sized, and degrees of hardness, all of which were integral to God’s project of building a spiritual house. In the case of Francis, it was a brotherhood of reconciliation able to embrace the whole creation.¹

Being a part of the church, the household of God, is not necessarily the popular thing to be in the larger world. Sometimes people think the church is old-fashioned or ancient. Other activities tempt us to think that they are more important than being part of God’s household. But if we make being a living stone in God’s household the priority in our lives, all the other dimensions of life will fall into place. If Jesus is the cornerstone, the center of our life, if we pattern our lives after him, all the other pieces will come together to make a meaningful life.

Today we are reminded that we are God’s chosen people, chosen not for privilege and status, but chosen for service and responsibility. We are members of God’s royal priesthood. A priest is someone who has direct access to God, someone who can go to God in prayer. As priests, we are called to pray to God for ourselves, for other people, for the church, and for the world. We are citizens of a holy nation, with dual citizenship in the world and in God’s kingdom. Sometimes the two will clash and we are faced with a choice about how to respond. We are given these special roles so that we can be Jesus’ partners in ministry, continuing his ministry on earth today. We are called to be instruments of God, working on God’s behalf and speaking of God’s love. With our lives, our words and our actions, we are called to share with people the good news of God’s love and the new way of living Jesus has shown us. As we do that, the world will be a better place.

Most importantly, as a living stone in God's household, you always have a place in God's family. When the world tries to tell you that you aren't good enough, or tries to reject you like they did Jesus, remember that you are accepted by God. You have a place in God's family. When others try to make you feel like nobody, in God's sight you are always somebody, somebody special, somebody important, somebody called to do the holy work of Jesus.

As living stones, we are united in the one household of God. We join our gifts to one another and marvel at the wondrous works of God through us and among us.

¹ Message from the Office of the Presiding Bishop, August 4, 2003, *Episcopal Church Web Site*, episcopalchurch.org. Quoted in *Homiletics*, March/April 2005, p. 72.

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