

1 Peter 2 New International Version (NIV)

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”^[b]

⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”^[c] ⁸and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”^[d]

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹**But you** are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

[Pray]

How many of you have ever visited Cannon Beach Oregon and observed Haystack Rock rising up out of the sandy beach? It is quite picturesque, isn't it? Have any of you visited Morro Bay on the Central CA coast? Morro Rock towers above the beach about 10 times larger than Haystack Rock. Pretty impressive. Our family used to visit this beach a lot when I was growing up.

Perhaps that is why I was so disappointed when, as a teenager my family visited New England where we traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts.

I had eagerly anticipated seeing Plymouth Rock--the proverbial rock on which the pilgrims of the Mayflower disembarked when they stepped onto solid ground in the New World. Plymouth Rock, in my mind's eye, was at least as big as Haystack Rock. But it turned out to be no bigger than a smart car!

What a disappointment!

When I got to thinking about it, rocks appear prominently in the pages of the Bible:

--With a sling shot and one smooth stone, David felled the Giant Goliath (I Samuel 17:49-50)

--God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel regarding the restoration of Israel, including their inner transformation:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)

--God is compared to a ROCK--on who is always present, dependable, reliable, a safe refuge who will protect his people.

--Hidden in the cleft of the rock, Moses experiences the nearness of God's presence and glory (Exodus 22)

--In the Gospels, Jesus warns of sowing seed on rocky soil; he urges us to wisely build our lives on the rock--a solid foundation, as opposed to sand.

Why? Inevitably the storms of life will come. One's choices of foundation will make the difference between devastation or survival.

In today's epistle reading, Peter is talking about the church. He doesn't use the word "church" but several metaphors that get at what it is that the church is meant to be.

In Greek, the word "ecclesia" is derived from the verb "to call" kaleo--and the prefix "ek" meaning "out of". In other words, the church consists of those who are the "called out ones".

From what are we "called out"?

Peter tells us in v. 9 that the church are those "who are called out of darkness, into God's marvelous/wonderful light." Next Sunday Advent begins. Advent is a season in the life of the church when we celebrate the coming of the Light of the World--Jesus--into our world which is shrouded in darkness.

Furthermore, Peter writes that "once we were no people, now we are God's people." In other words, we are called from insignificance (no people), into significance (being God's people)!

He goes on to say **that we are chosen**--I can only imagine that each of us have had the experience of being chosen, or not. Perhaps we were chosen as a team member, for a job or promotion, as a dance partner, as a life partner. It can be a devastating experience to the last one chosen, or not chosen at all!

Jesus himself says (John 15:16): "**You did not choose me, but I chose you** and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."

We are chosen by God, and belong to God's family.

Ordinary objects may acquire value, depending upon who possesses them. For example, I heard about an ordinary wooden cross--retail cost? About \$10.00. This ordinary item sold at auction for 100 times that amount--why? Because it had belonged to Elvis Presley.

Not only are you and I made in God's image, we acquire value because we are chosen by and belong to God. Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:19, "You are not your own, "....

As God's chosen ones, we are forgiven! We are called out of insignificance, into significance.

Furthermore, this passage focuses on the idea of "living stones"--there's an oxymoron if ever there was one! Living stones? If there is one thing a stone ***definitely is not, it is NOT alive!***

What was Peter thinking??

The metaphor of rocks/stones is one with which Peter could readily identify. His very name, "**Peter**" or "**petros**" means "**rock**". As a fisherman he was known as Simon. When Peter encountered Christ, he gained a new identity and a new name. In fact, Christ makes a play on this word in Matthew 16:18.

After Peter confesses that Christ is the Messiah, Christ says to him:

"And I tell you, you are Peter (petros/rock), and on this rock (Petra) I will build my church."

"Petros" means "a detached stone or boulder" (singular).

"Petra" means a "massive rock, a type of foundation".

The church is NOT built on Peter, the disciple. The church is built on the LORD whom Peter confesses. The church is built upon the faith of those who believe as Peter does; those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as the "rock of their salvation".

In this passage, Peter says Christ is the Cornerstone, and we are living stones--built together into a spiritual house (v.5). Perhaps you are familiar with the song lyric:

"The church is NOT a building; the church is NOT the steeple.

The church is NOT a resting place, the church IS the people!"

By definition, a cornerstone is more than symbolic. It is a stone which lies at the corner of two walls, serving to unite them. Specifically, a stone built into a **corner of the foundation**, is important to the edifice as the actual or nominal starting point in the building.

Christ is, by God's design, the foundation or cornerstone of the church. But a cornerstone does not make a building!

Recently neighbors of ours developed a water problem in their house. After consulting with several professionals, it was determined that a retaining wall was needed. Soon a load of gravel and a load of rocks were dumped in their front yard. **Left to themselves, they were simple a pile of lifeless, useless rocks.**

However, soon some skilled masons began to work. *First, they dug down and laid a foundation. Then they carefully worked, fitting the rocks together, making a retaining wall. The stones found beauty and purpose when fit "together by skilled craftsmen. As individual "stones", enlivened by God's Holy Spirit, we are built together by God into a "spiritual house".*

In v. 5 and v. 9 Peter says that we are a "holy priesthood". What??

Holy?? That does not mean "sinless" or "sacred". It means "set apart" from the rest.

Did you know that in Latin, the word for "priest" (pontifex) means "bridgebuilder"?

We are called or "set apart" by God, to be "bridgebuilders"!

No longer do we require a priest to intercede for us, as they did in OT times. Now Christ has quite literally "bridged" the gap between us and God through his death on the cross. Christ intercedes for us. Christ is our Great High Priest according to Hebrews 4:14-16 NIV.

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, ^[1] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

May we, by our witness and intercession for others, be the "bridge" by which others come to know Christ!

Several years ago at a potluck dinner for families from the church's after school program, the program coordinator engaged all the parents, the students and the volunteers in a game or "mixer". The idea was to ask the person next to you a few questions (grade in school, favorite sport or team, hobby, etc.) and vice versa. Then as she went from table to table, we took turns introducing one another to the whole group.

As we listened, several of our retired folks were introduced: "This is Ron, **he used to be** a Boeing engineer, now he likes to travel." "This is Joan, **she used to be** a nurse and now she likes caring for her grandchildren."

Eight year old Samantha was my partner and was going to introduce me. She'd obviously been listening very carefully because she turned to me with a concerned look on her face and asked anxiously: "Pastor Lynell, **what did you used to be?**"

Peter says:

We used to be in darkness, now we are called out and into God's marvelous light.

We used to be insignificant; now we are called to significance.

We used to be "nobodies"--"not a people"--but now we are "God's chosen people".

We used to be those without mercy, now we have received mercy.

We used to be unloved; now we are God's special possession.

Sojourner Truth, a former slave who worked for the abolition of slavery said: **"We ain't what we can be, we ain't what we gonna be, but thank God, we ain't what we was!"**

Because of this fundamental truth--that God has transformed us from our former state--*what we used to be*--into recipients of God's mercy--God's undeserved favor and blessing--**we are called to "declare the wonderful deeds of the Living God!"**

We are now "To declare the praises of God who called us out of darkness into [his] wonderful light." (v.9)

This passage is packed full of images and metaphors that inform our identity as the church--"the called out ones". This fall our focus has been on the abundance of spiritual gifts that God has given to us at Calvary, and that God is calling us to serve and engage our community.

The question for us today is this;
How are we living into this identity?

What kind of "living stone" or "rock star" are you? Are you vitally connected to Christ the Cornerstone?

Are you vitally connected to the other living stones that comprise the body of Christ here at CPC?

Are you and I willing to proclaim the wonderful deeds of the Living God?

Are you and I willing to be bridge-builders, to extend God's mercy to others, and to introduce others to this Living God?

By God's grace, we must find creative, Spirit-filled ways to live into this reality and our identity as

---God's chosen and precious ones

---God's bridgebuilders---

"rock stars" or "living stones".

May we indeed, declare the wonderful deeds of our living God!

Amen!