

Have you ever considered a stone to be something more than it is?

Around New England, that might not be such a strange question. We live among stones, we practically trip over them. Stone walls lining old fields. Stones pulled from the earth by generations before us as they cleared fields for planting. Stones stacked marking boundaries and holding things together. They are part of our landscape and our lives.

We know what stones are for. They are solid. They stay where you put them. They behave themselves. They do not interrupt your life once they are set in place.

Yes, we know what stones are for... or at least we think we do.

Peter writes today, *“Come to Christ, a **living stone**... and like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”*

A “living stone.” What a concept. Those are two words I’ll bet we would not have put together. But Peter does.

Peter doesn’t imagine a single stone sitting by itself. Living stones are part of something being built together. So, a living stone is not an isolated spiritual person. It is someone shaped into belonging in community. Someone who supports other stones and is also supported. Someone who is part of something larger than themselves.

And so, Peter calls out, *Come, you “living stones,”* and join with not just any old stone, but with the one the builders rejected. The cornerstone.

Now, I’m not exactly fluent in construction-ese. But even I know that a cornerstone’s purpose, no matter how pretty it is made to look, is not decorative. It is the stone everything else must line up with. It sets the angle. It determines the shape of the whole project. And it decides whether what you are building will stand the test of time... or not.

Which simply means... when that cornerstone is set, everything else has to adjust to it.

And, well... that’s where things start to get a little inconvenient.

Because what happens when our lives do not quite line up with that stone? What happens when the way we have arranged things, our schedules, our priorities, even who we make room for and who we don’t, does not match the angle of Christ?

And even more inconvenient, what happens when our communities do not quite line up? The systems we rely on, the ways we organize power, the lines we draw about who belongs and who does not. What happens when those do not align with the way of Jesus?

After all, a cornerstone does not shift to match the structure. The structure shifts to match the cornerstone.

And Peter says that cornerstone stone is Christ.

Which goes a long way to saying why it was rejected. Because Jesus has always had a way of being... inconvenient.

Inconvenient to the powerful.

Inconvenient to those who exclude and persecute.

Inconvenient to those building something that looks solid on the outside but isn't quite aligned underneath.

And, if we're honest... inconvenient in our own lives as well.

Inconvenient when compassion interrupts our plans.

Inconvenient when telling the truth risks how we're seen.

Inconvenient when love asks more of us than we were planning to give.

Yes... the Gospel is inconvenient.

And it is because it is alive and moving in the world... and it asks the same of us.

Jesus speaks of living water, water that moves and flows and refuses to stay contained. He speaks of bread that nourishes beyond physical hunger. And now Peter says even stones can be living. Living as though resurrection changes the nature of things. Living as though what seems settled might not be as fixed as we thought.

We can see it all around us. The way roots crack sidewalks and weeds poke through. The way water reshapes rock and lets a different path emerge in the flow of the stream. Resurrection life has a way of pushing through what we thought was solid and unmovable.

So, there it is, that inconvenient Gospel again. Showing up, not in big, abstract ways, but in the small, daily choices we make, in how we speak, in how we listen, in who we make time for, in whether we turn toward or away from life.

Because alignment with Christ is not a one-time decision. It is something we live into, moment by moment... day by day... choice by choice... shaped into living stones.

And into these everyday movements comes Christ, our cornerstone, to be the measure for our lives. The Spirit pulling at us, asking us to consider what might need to shift within us for us to really know true fullness of life. Helping us to acknowledge that something in us may need to

be rebuilt, to realign. And I suppose that's exactly the point of the Gospel too. That God has a way of placing stones: situations, decisions, and people, in places we wouldn't have chosen.

And that is not easy. It sure was not easy for Stephen.

In the reading from Acts, Stephen is "filled with grace and power." He speaks truth without reservation. He sees a vision of God's presence that others cannot or will not see. And his witness unsettles the structures that people have counted on.

His life, aligned with Christ, a true living stone, becomes uncomfortable and, frankly, dangerously inconvenient to those around him.

And there is a painful irony there. The world throws stones at Stephen.

It seems that the ones the world rejects often become the very ones through whom God builds something new. Living stones—like Martin Luther King Jr., like Nelson Mandela, or like Archbishop Oscar Romero, shot at the altar because he refused to let the Gospel stay convenient. (I'm sure you can name many others.) Again, and again, God chooses those living stones. Builds with them. Brings life through them. And somehow, we are those living stones too.

Which means being a living stone is not about being perfect or polished. It is about being aligned to the cornerstone. Aligned with Christ in such a way that our lives begin to take on his shape.

And that alignment will not always be comfortable. It will ask things of us. It will move us toward people and places we may not have chosen on our own.

It will, at times, make us inconvenient people. Not difficult for the sake of being difficult. But inconvenient in the way love is inconvenient. Inconvenient in the way mercy is inconvenient. Inconvenient in the way justice is inconvenient. In the way that the truth of the Gospel is inconvenient.

As C. S. Lewis once put it, *"If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."*

And I think there is a kind of freedom in that. Because it means that when the Gospel unsettles us, when it stretches us, when it asks more of us than we expected... something is not necessarily going wrong.

Something may be going exactly right.

So here we are, people of Atonement. Living stones. Not meant to sit quietly in place. But part of something God is building, right here, among us.

So maybe the challenge is not whether the Gospel will be inconvenient. Because it will.

Maybe the question is: how and where is Christ asking us to realign with him?  
Where is the Spirit nudging us, maybe just a little, from comfort toward action?  
Where is love asking something more of us... even here, even now?

Because the promise of resurrection is that life will break in in the most inconvenient, and grace-filled ways. And the life of living stones, has a way of changing things.

Yes, the Gospel is inconvenient. And thanks be to God for that. Because it means it is alive.....and so are we.

Amen.