

May 10, 2020  
Fifth Sunday of Easter & Mother's Day  
"Allow Yourself to be Built" - Pastor Barnes

*Text: 1 Peter 2:2-10 & Psalm 31:1-5*

Since this is what we traditionally call "Mother's Day" and yet there are so many possibilities of what that means, we understand the need for nurture, love, listening, compassion, raising up, discipline and guidance. None of which at each moment might never fully be felt or understood, we give thanks for hope and patience that keeps us connected in whatever form family takes. Understand that God is wholly "other." So saying that, we pray, "Our Father," and yet Jesus would say, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." Matt. 23:37. Psalm 36:7 "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings." We have both understandings of God, who IS love!

So, a prayer:

*Gracious and loving God, we come humbly giving thanks for the many ways in which the care and nurture of a mother has come to us. Love that just overflows to family and children and has enough for our wider family. Mothers who either care for their own or adopt many in need of caring. Mothers who struggle with work, life and unusual family make-ups yet find enough "tired" love to keep giving. Women who become known as "grandma, aunt, or mom," not because of biology but because of feeling, we give thanks.*

*Easter reminds us that no one is ever lost to God who raises us up! So for moms no longer with us or moms who wished for children and grieved. We have the healing of the Resurrection. So on this day we turn all things over to God who does gather us under His wings. Amen.*

**HOMILY:**

Jesus affirms what we know! That He is that solid rock! That He is our foundation! I am the way, the truth and the life, He says.

WE can stand on no other...for all other ground is sinking sand....as the old hymn goes.

Our Psalm 31: "You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me."

I was drawn to 1 Peter 2:4-5: "Come to him (Jesus), a **LIVING STONE**"

Though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God sight, and like "**LIVING STONES**" **let yourselves be built into a spiritual house**, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Two things I would like to tackle in this sermon:

1. What in the heck is a "living stone?"
2. "Allow yourselves to be built".....do we pick and choose the time to be built or what kind of structure?

#1 - Living Stones....

I think of Mary the mother of our Lord....

All of a sudden this brighter than bright “thing” called an Angel...Gabriel appears to her and says: Guess what, God is going to use you! And “use you” not in a “fall off the log” easy thing... Oh, no! The Holy Spirit is going to bring the beginnings of a child and you will give birth...not just any baby, but the ONLY Son of God.

And by the way...you HAVE to explain this not only to Joseph, but family and community who will want to shun and maybe stone you!

Mary is becoming a “living stone.” And probably would not have chosen to be a stone used to build in quite this way!

“Allow yourselves to be built...” says 1 Peter. It would not seem to be always a pick and choose OR how you might like to “build” your life,” kind of thing.

Our faith and hope are to be open in “allowing” ourselves to be built as living stones.

Living Stones...is not just some wall you ignore. Not just brick and mortar...but stones that are open and used as God continues THROUGH YOU to build.

I am going to stand upon the Rock that is Jesus...a foundation that says we CAN be more.

I am filled with HOPE during this COVID-19 pandemic....

Hope because I see a lot of “Living Stones.”

Living Stones that put on face coverings and shields, caring for the sick and dying. Living Stones that see the needs of the hungry, the unemployed, those without family. THE LIST GOES ON!

For me - I look to John’s Gospel: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...Not so much about a label...Christian, Jew, Muslim, OR even Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian...BUT, God continues to call us ALL under his wing.

Do you think that when the heavenly time comes, God will ask: Well, when you were sewing all those face masks, baking the bread for others, “strapping in” rushing into another hospital ER or room, going to another house, using 3 D printers to make face shields, clapping for front line people, giving out food, sending money...

God would ask...well, what religion were you? Did you claim the name of Jesus?

I think rather...Did you act, give and share like my Son? Were you a “living stone,” or just another rock on the shore of life?

Oh yes, in our world...the confession still holds true: We are by NATURE sinful and unclean...Not building on solid rock but sinking sand...Yes, there will be price gouging. Yes, there will be hoarding.

One writer said: Some will have FAT wallets, but a very THIN souls.

Living Stones...You may have empty pockets...but an overflowing heart.

- **NOW the second Part** - *Allow yourself to be built.*

You know...I like projects that don’t have too many steps...clear directions and never have any parts left over! Or maybe a piece missing! I always like to have gotten enough parts/pieces at “Home Depot” or the hardware store, so I don’t have to keep making more trips back and forth! I don’t want to have to improvise to make a project work. It should always work the first time...because I am such a handy man! HA!

When we say: “Allow yourself to be built”. We want to know ahead of time...not too difficult. Not too messy or trouble. And of course, no strife or struggle.

Well, that is just not Biblical!

Now, I don’t want to be a “downer!”

But listen to the opening of Psalm 88:

*“O Lord, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; Incline your ear to my cry.*

*For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.”*

*“I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.”*

Ouch! Sounds like the building plans have either been lost or just gone haywire! But I wanted you to hear bad things don't just happen to people outside of God's care!

It reminds me a line in Princess Bride...Pirate Roberts says to the Princess: “Life is pain, highness...everyone else is selling something!” How dark is that! Yet if you remember they keep going.

So, how are we to be “built” in dark times? Sometimes...just one stone at a time. Sometimes...remembering that Trusting in God...is “building” even when the way is not clear.

Notice that in Psalm 88 - how does it open? “O Lord, God of my SALVATION”... the writer knows God is overcoming all things and is still his salvation! “When at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer”...He knows he is not truly abandoned....He is still praying!

And it says...in your presence...there is never complete abandonment!

You need to know that the writer of Psalm 88 wrote more psalms and many were of joy and adoration. But the feeling of abandonment? Because of Jesus, God's love, we know we will transition beyond the feeling of abandonment...

Yet on the cross for you and me, is not true for Jesus! There is a reason we celebrate Easter...because FOR US, Jesus was truly abandoned...listen: Matthew 27:45-46: *“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land (not just a cloudy day!) until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? That is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

We hear this part of the Passion every year...but I'm not sure we understand! For you and for me...this is not just a man dying...this is truly the Son of God completely abandoned by His Heavenly Father!

More than we would ever have to face. More than loneliness or fear. This is abandonment for you and me. This means that Jesus was in the darkest place beyond where you or I could ever think of being. Abandoned so our Hope would never have to be abandoned!

It is so we as living stones...can stand upon His rock and allow ourselves to be built into that spiritual house. No matter HOW dark...Jesus our Lord is still there! These dark times of virus and fear are difficult...Yet understand I am filled with HOPE. This is not a transactional approach to life. If I do this for you, then you will make life easier. NO. If that were true...then why Jesus?

Do you remember J.R.R. Tolkien's “Lord of the Rings?” Frodo and Sam his best friend, were making their way up the mountain...Mordor...because they had to destroy a ring that was evil. It finally became clear in their eyes, that there was no way to escape without dying. Through much pain, danger and struggle...their hearts were steeled, that no matter what, this had to be done, so they kept going and got to the top of the mountain! Yes, the ring was destroyed...it is a book after all!

But as living stones....it says: **ALLOW YOURSELVES TO BE BUILT**. This is giving over **ALL** you have, knowing that the final victory has been won. It is saying that **HOPE** cannot be forfeited or dampened by life circumstances. **HOPE** is the conviction and assurance of things unseen.

Know that I am not intending this sermon to be dour or draggy..Just a reminder that like as on Reformation we sing: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” **IN** part says: wins salvation glorious!

The final verse: “God’s Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes, who fear it; for God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit.”

**IN** faith and hope...I believe that God is fighting by our side. I believe what I see on the news besides the statistics, is **HOPE** enacted and given freely for and with others. I believe that God works in and through us no matter what we profess publically. There is just **TOO MUCH GOOD** being seen to be otherwise!

Don’t ignore, we are all growing into that spiritual house: “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is Good.”

I suppose some in our world, may never grow up! But a greater majority, are those living stones being built by God’s hand.

Psalm 31:3:

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold; for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.

So it is written and Jesus who goes before us...Because Jesus allowed himself to be “built,” there is no darkness that cannot be overcome. Like a good book...but real!

Here is the end: Psalm 31:15-16

*My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*

*Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*

So it is...So let it be!

Amen.