

## **“Under Construction”**

1 Peter 2:4-10

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This morning we hear from Peter’s letter to the Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. These people may well have been some of the very same people who gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Peter’s letter was an actual letter written to people who were displaced, not only spiritually but socially, economically, and politically. One of the things Peter does in this letter is tell us that in Christ, God creates a new place---God builds a new house---for those who have none.

The scripture that follows is built on Old Testament passages about stones. First, there is the image of the foundation stone from Isaiah 28. In the Old Testament this foundation stone was the *community* of Israel. In the New Testament, this foundation stone is Christ. Peter uses the odd phrase, “a living stone” to refer to Christ. And he even uses this phrase to refer to us. Some think “a living stone” refers to a stone in its natural state, uncut and in the ground.

Then we come across the idea of the stone the builders rejected<sup>1</sup>. Christ is described as the cornerstone/keystone. The keystone is the precisely cut center stone in an arch. The surrounding stones rest on the keystone. It is imperative that it be perfectly cut and balanced. No one would use an uncut stone for a keystone! So it makes some sense that Christ, the living stone, would be the stone the builders rejected.

Let us together listen to God’s word in these building images, as it comes to us from the first letter of Peter, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, beginning with verse 4:

**Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's 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. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal**

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the rejected stone comes to us from Psalm 118: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

**priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

When you walk into the Christian section of a bookstore, the message is clear: faith is something you do alone. Just check out some best selling titles (as compiled by Library Journal): It's All About Him, one woman's story of a failed marriage and what she learned about God from that. Facing Your Giants, by Max Lucado, and Get Out of That Pit, by Beth Moore, both of which have to do with dealing with your own personal problems by calling on God.

There is a sense in which we Christians go it alone, sometimes even without benefit of Christ. And these themes of independence and isolation are not just modern themes. Such ideas are common in folk tales. People have been telling these kinds of stories for as long as there have been people.

One such story is told of a mouse who lived on a farm. One day he looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package. He was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap.

Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning: "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!" The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is of grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it."

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mousetrap in the house!" The pig sympathized, but said, "I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers."

Finally the mouse turned to the cow and said, "There is a mousetrap in the house!" The cow said, "Well, Mr. Mouse, I'm sorry for you, but that's the way they've always done things around here."

So the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, feeling very alone. That night a sound was heard throughout the house--the sound of a mousetrap going off. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a venomous snake whose tail was caught in the trap.

The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital, and she returned home with a fever. Everyone knows you treat a fever with chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient.

But his wife's sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well; she died. So many people came to her funeral, the farmer had to slaughter the cow to feed them. The mouse looked upon it all from his crack in the wall with great sadness.

And there is a tale from the Philippines, and it goes like this<sup>2</sup>.

High up in a palm tree house, a large and quarrelsome family once lived. One day the family members began to quarrel about who was the most important member of the family. Soon the parts of the house began to do the same.

"I am the most important part," said one of the poles that held the house high off the ground. "I was the first pole driven into the ground. All the rest of you came after me." The other poles disagreed. "Without us," one of them said, "you wouldn't be able to hold the house off the ground."

As the poles argued, the floor supports chimed in, "No one would care about the poles if we weren't here to hold you together!"

The cross supports called out, "Without us, you would all wobble and sag!"

The roof beams and the ceiling and the palm leaf roof quarreled bitterly over which of them was the most important.

And here in these stories we see ourselves. How we reject the idea that we are all interdependent. How we completely forget that God wants to form us into a living house in which all the parts need one another and function together for a higher purpose. How we argue over who is most important. How we don't even think about the fact that Christ our cornerstone.

Eugene Peterson reminds us that whether we like it or not, the moment we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are at the same time a member of a Christian church. Even if we refuse to participate, even if we are absent, we are a member. We can no more be

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<sup>2</sup> From [I Can Make a Difference: A Treasury to Inspire Our Children](#), by Marian Wright Edelman

a Christian and have nothing to do with the church than we can be a person and not be in a family. It is not an option. It is, he says, part of the fabric of redemption.<sup>3</sup>

Because redemption is a communal thing. We cannot do it alone. We are a group of living stones, under construction to become the collective community God intended us to be. Scripture says we get our life from Christ, the living cornerstone. We share in His ministry, we are prepared by God to show the world his glorious redemption.

When we fellowship, when we do a mission project, when we invite the community to Arts Camp, when we study together, when we prepare a bereavement meal, when we sing in the choir, when we hang door hangers, we are being built into something connected and joined. We are held together by the mortar of our common faith in Christ, fashioned into something lasting and substantial. We are a part of something that has been building for over 2,000 years, a structure that will long survive us. And we are all a part of the construction of all the saints who have gone before us.

Every stone is different; some are small and seemingly insignificant. Others are weighty and substantial. Some stones sparkle in the sun; others cut the glare with their subtle finish.

Except for the cornerstone, no part of the building is more important than another. Each part has its function; each part holds its place. Like the parts of the palm tree house, each one balanced and fitted together to secure the house on stilts, so are we.

And as every stone is fitted together to form a perfect arch, resting on the cornerstone, so are we in Christ, fitted for our life together, depending upon each other and resting in Christ.

Sometimes you look around the Christian sections of many bookstores and you cannot actually find the keystone. Christ is missing. And yet we know Jesus is powerfully and undeniably crucial. The building structure collapses without the cornerstone. This building cannot even exist without the cornerstone.

We are all a part of the church. The church, in which every member is important, even the smallest and least significant. Even the mouse.

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, p. 176.

Soon we will sing a very old and familiar hymn. Pay close attention to the words in the first verse. Take a look at the living stones to your right and to your left. Then think about our foundation and our cornerstone. In him we are the church, always and ever under construction.

*Christ is Made the Sure Foundation  
Christ the head and cornerstone  
Chosen of the Lord and precious  
Binding all the church in one  
Holy Zion's help forever and our confidence alone.*