

**Like Living Stones**

Communion

May 7, 2023

**Psalm 31:(1-2), 3-5, 15-16**

<sup>1</sup> *In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. <sup>2</sup> Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me... (at the start of the service)*

<sup>3</sup> *You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, <sup>4</sup> take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. <sup>5</sup> Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God... <sup>15</sup> My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. <sup>16</sup> Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:2-10**

<sup>2</sup> *Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. <sup>4</sup> Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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." <sup>7</sup> 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," <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.*



Life is not always easy. There are rocks in the road; there are stones that we find in our path. Sometimes these feel like mountains instead of rocks, like boulders instead of stones.

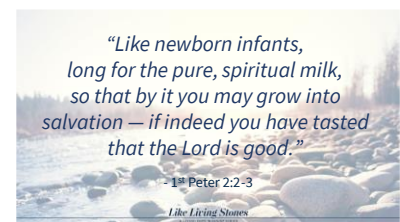
At times we trip and fall; we stumble and are bruised and hurt. But we get up and keep walking. We rise again and continue to move forward. This journey of life is not easy. We need someone to be the rock upon which we stand, to be the refuge that protects us when the storm is strongest and the road the roughest. As we begin to explore all this in our time together, let us go to the Lord in prayer...

Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2 as we begin. Sarah Wright begins her discussion of verse 2 with a great analogy. Have you ever heard the word “hangry?” For a long time there were Snickers commercials about people who were hangry. I loved these commercials because I am one who is prone to getting hangry. One of my favorites was the filmed at the Brady Bunch house. Here it is! (*Play video the PPT begins.*)



That’s what it means to be “hangry.” Now, here’s what Peter writes in verses 2-3: “*Like*

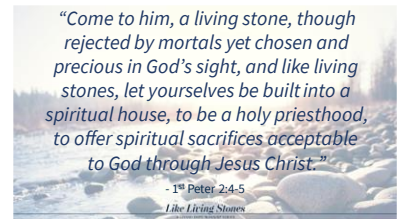
*newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*” Here



Peter begins with milk, with feeding, with infancy and nurturing, with tasting and seeing. What Peter was telling his readers and us today is this: we should be hangry for the word of God. Because when we are hangry, we develop a laser-sharp focus for what we want.

And when we have tasted and seen that God is good, then our focus becomes the pure spiritual milk that the Lord provides because once we have tasted, then we know that nothing else will satisfy.

Continuing into verses 4-5 we read, *“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.”* There is a lot in these two verses. First, the invitation is to come to Jesus Christ, the living stone, the foundation of our faith, the cornerstone of our faith. Yes, Jesus was rejected and killed by mortals. But long before that he was chosen by God. As the beloved son, Jesus was and is precious in God’s sight. And even though he was dead, Christ resurrected now lives. Peter wants his readers and us to know the implications of these truths. Just as Jesus was, Peter says, you too are chosen by God, you too are beloved, you too are precious in God’s sight, and you too can live.

And there is a second invitation: *“let yourselves be built.”* The general invitation is to be built into a spiritual house, into part of the royal priesthood. Today we might say this is an invitation to be a part of the body of Christ. In and through the life of Jesus, there was an important shift that took place though. Prior to Christ, God’s presence was in a place – in the tabernacle and then in the temple. After the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, God no longer manifest himself or herself in a particular place. Instead, God came to dwell in the people who praised and worshipped God. That was a radical and personal shift.

To be a part of the body of Christ, the living presence of God in the world, this is not just a general invitation. It is a personal invitation too. Thus, it requires a personal response. The invitation is to allow Christ to build you and me into the house that he began to build himself, into the house that he entrusted to his disciples. The invitation is to be a living stone, to be a part of the structure, to be part of the fellowship of all believers. To accept the invitation is to make the choice to build one's life upon the cornerstone, upon the rock of Jesus Christ. As Sarah Wright points out, it is the cornerstone that is critical. She notes that the cornerstone "provides the structure with its strength and stability" (page 85.) For Peter, for his readers, for us – Jesus is our one sure foundation.

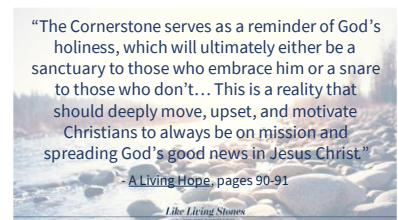


The invitation is also to be like a living stone – to be a royal priest to others, to offer our lives as a spiritual sacrifice. In lieu of the old system of animal sacrifices, as followers of Christ we are to offer spiritual sacrifices – praise, prayers, worship, acts of mercy and service. In choosing to live this life of active faith, Peter was inviting the believers to become a part of one another and to remember that they were a royal priesthood with a purpose in this world. Sarah Wright describes it this way: "A structure built on the True Cornerstone, Jesus, will delight in God and live out his holiness in principle and practice" (page 86.) In this place, in this family of God, when living a life of faith, hear the assurance that comes in verse 6. Here Peter reminds them and us that "*whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.*" What a promise that is for you and for me.

While the promise of God's presence and protection is wonderful for those who believe, the reality is that not all do believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Peter turns to this harsh reality in verse 8.

Here he describes Jesus as: *“A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”* People reject Jesus. They do. And when people make the choice to walk without Jesus, life is harder to navigate. Without a partner, without someone to help guide you, you fall and stumble more frequently. And why do some stumble and fall? Peter puts it this way: *“They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”*

Now, Peter did not say this, and I do not say this for us to be like, “Oh, that’s so sad.” Yes, it is sad. And he did not say this as a means to look down on or to judge those who stumbled and fell over the word of God. Nor should we. Quite the opposite. Peter, instead of seeing the failure of another, he sees the opportunity to be the royal priesthood, to be the body of Christ at work in the world. On Day 4 of Week 3, Sarah Wright speaks of this response. On pages 90-91 she writes, “The Cornerstone serves as a reminder of God’s holiness, which will ultimately either be a sanctuary to those who embrace him or a snare to those who don’t... This is a reality that should deeply move, upset, and motivate Christians to always be on mission and spreading God’s good news in Jesus Christ.”



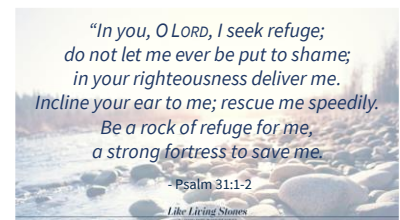
As royal priests and as ministers of the gospel, it is our charge to go out and seek those who are stumbling, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them, helping them to find footing on the cornerstone that is Christ Jesus. Peter gives the charge with these words: *“You are a chosen race, a royal 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.”*



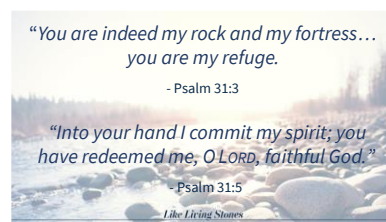
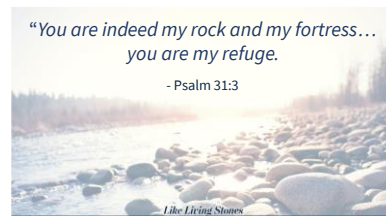
Peter closes our passage for today reminding his readers and us of what God has done to make us into living stones.

In verse 10 he writes, *“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.”* These words echo the sheep analogy from last week and from Luke 15: You once were lost, but now you are found. You once lived in sin, but now you know mercy. You once were a people scattered among the world. Now you are the family of God, bound together by Christ. You once chased after the things of this world, living on a shaky foundation. Now you stand upon the rock, upon the cornerstone.

The Psalm this week talks about stones too. As we transition, please turn with me to Psalm 31. To begin our service, I read verses 1-2. In the opening verses the psalmist, believed to be David, offers this plea to God: *“In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.”* I believe these are words that you and I, like almost every other Christian in the world, prays in some form or another on a pretty regular basis. David calls upon God to be there for him, to be his place of refuge, to deliver him from his trial or distress. David begs for God to be his rock of refuge and his strong fortress. When we find ourselves in a difficult situation or circumstance, we too seek for God to refuge and fortress.



There is a shift as we turn to verse 3. The plea shifts to part remembrance and part request. In lamenting the challenges of life, the psalmist is reminded of God's goodness and faithfulness. In seeking God amid the dangers and threats pressing in upon him, David's attentions turn toward the one who provides safety, assurance, and hope. David writes with confidence, "*You are indeed my rock and my fortress... you are my refuge.*" David recalls, as you and I often do as we lift our prayers to God, that God has been and will be his refuge and his fortress. The Psalm encourages us to do the same – to name the things from which we are running, the conflicts and challenges that threaten to undo us, and to turn to God, trusting that God will again provide all that we need. It is with this faith and trust that we too can declare, "*Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*" There is an implication of continued trust here too. There is a connection here in these two verses. As we claim and live into God as our rock, fortress, and refuge again and again, we gain the trust and faith to commit our lives to the Lord.



The last two verses of our Psalm reiterate and add emphasis to this trusting relationship. Here we read, "*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.*" The psalmist implies that God's shelter is permanent, a constant, loving presence that remains steadfast. The question for listeners, then, becomes how to abide in this shelter of grace. Taking up residence under God's protection should elicit some sort of response on the part of the refugee.

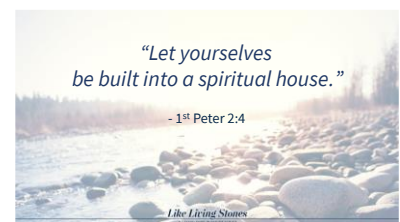


Thus, God is not the only one taking action. The relationship has two sides to it. So, how will our lives be different as a result of the safe haven that God has provided again and again?



Turn with me once again to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2 as we seek to answer this question of our response. We cannot simply sit back and cry out, ‘Save me, God!’ We cannot expect God to do all of the work. Returning to verse 5, Peter says we need to be part of it – to *“let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”* Yes, God will do the actual building when it comes right down to it, but we need to be willing partners. We need to want it, to allow it, to seek it out, to be hangry. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to tap into and to use the potential inside all of us to be part of the royal priesthood, to be a part of the holy nation of God. The Spirit of God waits for us to be willing participants in the building of the kingdom of God. The Spirit waits because we must be willing. And therein lies the challenge for many of us.

So Peter is urging us, really, to *“let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”* He is urging because there is an act of surrender here. Our tendency is not to ask for help. Our tendency is to say we have it all figured out. In terms of building, we say I’ll hold that wall up, I’ll frame in that window, I’ll swing and saw and screw and nail. No, the call is to let ourselves be built. Let God build; let God reveal the master plan. We are not the architect – we are the building material.





When we surrender, trusting fully in God, then we will be built into something greater than ourselves, into something that we cannot even begin to imagine. We do not know what we will become. God is not done with us yet. That's why we are living stones. That's why Jesus is a living stone – one that is alive and active and moving in our world and in our lives. Just when we think we have life handled, when we think that we have it all figured out, life reminds us that we don't. It is then that we must once again turn to this living stone, to Jesus Christ our cornerstone, our firm foundation. It is then that we discover there is more to Christ, more to us, more to our relationship. Here we are truly living. Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.



### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. In the big scope of your faith journey, when has God most been your rock, fortress, and/or refuge? How did these times deepen your faith and trust?
- 2) *Pray*. Where do you need God to extend you mercy right now in your life? Offer a prayer of repentance and seek God's grace and mercy. God loves you.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:8-12. Looking back over your last week, which part of these words speaks most loudly to you? What is your response?