

## The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020

*The work of the Church involves everyone. Pastors have their role, but all Christians serve as “priests” and “living stones” in Christ’s Church.*

**LUTHER’S MORNING PRAYER:** I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

**OLD TESTAMENT:** Acts 17:1-12 *Opposition drove God’s workers out of cities, but it couldn’t drive the results of God’s Word from hearts.*

*When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

**GOSPEL:** John 14:1-12 *Jesus predicts his departure, but he promises his disciples will do great things, that is the miracle of faith in the hearts of many.*

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

**VERSE OF THE DAY:** *Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord. Alleluia. (John 14:6)*

**SERMON: 1 PETER 2:4-10**

### **My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less!**

***As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For 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.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once 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.***

You heard of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It was built between the years 1173 to 1372. This twelve story, solid marble tower began to lean even before it was completed. Maybe the word “pisa” tells us why. “Pisa” means “marshy land.” This tower leans because they built it on a marsh. Compare that with those magnificent cathedrals throughout Europe. They don’t lean because they were not built on marshes. Their foundations go as far down as 50 to seventy-five feet to solid rock. They will not move.

What is your life built on? Sometimes it seems like a marsh. But we just sang a hymn that reminds us that we are not built on a marsh, but on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. Let’s put our trust in Christ and boldly confess that he is our rock.

#### *I. Christ is our foundation.*

The truth of the matter is, you cannot ignore Christ. You may recall, when Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph presented the newborn Jesus to the Lord at the temple. A man named Simeon saw the child and prophesied concerning him: ***“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”*** You can never be neutral about Jesus. Either he will cause you to rise or fall. Either you believe in him or you do not. This is what Peter tells us in our text. ***“Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.”*** This text uses several different stone images. The first is a capstone. Do you know what a capstone is? It is center stone at the top of an archway. Look at pictures of stone arches from the ancient world, many of which are still standing today. That capstone is crucial. It has a way of distributing the weight of an entire wall down the two sides of the arch and makes sure the arch and the wall do not crumble.

Jesus is important to you. Like the capstone, we know if Jesus was not in our lives, we would collapse. But he isn’t important to everyone. The Bible pictures them like builders. They have the perfect capstone. It is designed to be a capstone. It fits perfectly, but they reject it. Take for example the leaders in Jesus’ day. So many of the Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the law, did not like what they saw in

Jesus. So they threw him away.

And here is the irony. Because they threw Jesus away, he becomes a stone that causes them to stumble. This is the second stone in our text. How does the rejected Christ cause people to fall? Simeon tells us in his prophecy I quoted earlier. “...**so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.**” Again, take the leaders in Jesus day. Outwardly they looked good and pious. But when they met Christ, their thoughts were revealed. It wasn’t about God. It was about them. They praised their own deeds, not God. They were convinced they were not sinners, at least not that bad. So when they met their Savior, their thoughts came out and they rejected him.

How about you? On what is your hope built? Well, let me tell you what you hope is not built on. It can’t be built on the fact that you go to church. Those who rejected Jesus went to church regularly. Don’t get me wrong. I am not suggesting we don’t need to come to church, even if it is on the internet. But going to church doesn’t make us Christian.

Nor do our prayers. When Elijah faced the 400 Baal prophets in a showdown, their prayers were spoken with much more enthusiasm than many of my prayers. Our prayers, no matter how earnest, don’t make us Christians. Nor can your hope be built on the idea that you are better than others. There are many non-Christians out there who behave better than Christians. We can’t say we are better.

If such things can’t give us hope, then what can? Christ. “**As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For 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.”**” Here is the third stone in our text. You know what a cornerstone is. We have one on the corner of our main entrance. Today a cornerstone is the last stone to be laid. It is symbolic and has the date the building was built. In Jesus’ day the cornerstone is the first stone to be laid. The stonemason would carefully carve it out so it is perfect: every angle is exactly 90 degrees. They lay it first and then build the walls from it. If the stone is perfect, the walls will be perfect. If the stone is off, your building would be off and unstable.

Jesus is not the last stone to be placed to make things look good. He is the most important stone on which everything depends. Look around you. God has not told us that this pandemic is a special punishment sent from him for some wrong someone committed. No, it is just one of a long list of pandemics and disasters that afflict the world and those who live on it. This is a reminder that there is something terribly wrong with the world. It is sin. By one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and all of creation has been groaning under the weight of sin.

But did you catch the quote Peter made here? “...**and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.**” We can be pretty good at hiding sin. But before God we can’t hide it anymore. Even the most hardened criminal will blush in shame. As it says in Daniel 12: “**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.**” But the Lord promises we will escape the shame. I like how Paul described Baptism. It isn’t the removal of dirt from the body, but a clean conscience before God. There is only one way to clean a dirty conscience, three simple words, “I forgive you.” And what does the Lord say to you? I forgive you for the sake of Jesus Christ who makes things right between us by his death on the cross.

If I built my hope on my church attendance, I will be in doubt for there are services I missed or I attended in body only. If I built it on my prayer life, I know many of my prayers were mere words. But if I built my hope on Christ, I am sure. He is that perfect cornerstone. His death pays for every sin. His holy life takes the place of my unholy life. We stand before God on solid rock. And that is the other point in our text. We are living stones who testify about him.

*II. Christ gives us a purpose in life.*

I did my vicar year at Trinity in Caledonia, WI. They had a wall behind the altar like we do, but it was different. It was built out of fieldstone, and each stone came from members and their farms. When they looked at the altar, they saw themselves. It was their stone up there.

The last stones in our text are us. ***“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*** Don’t think of church as brick and mortar and padded pews and lights. Think of it as a spiritual house built with living stones. Note it says stones. Believers are not mass produced bricks that all look the same. Each stone is different. Believers come in all sorts of shapes and sizes: men, women, children, rich, poor, slave, free. Each has certain gifts from the Holy Spirit: some are blessed with extras compassion, others communication skills, still others with generosity even if they don’t have much.

And they are built up into a spiritual house. Like that fieldstone wall in Caledonia, you can take stones which are all different sizes and shapes and still piece them together into a uniform wall. Believers fit together even though they come in different shapes or sizes or skills or gifts. The mortar that binds them together is spiritual as they all share one faith, one Lord, one Baptism. And this house does not occupy any one location. No, this spiritual house is the Communion of saints, with each believer joined to another whether in Arlington, MN, Arlington, TX or Malawi or the Ukraine. Another stone is added when there is a Baptism. And when a believer dies, we don’t remove that stone; it stays for this Church is eternal and even dead Christians are living stones.

Since this house is spiritual, these believers offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Someone comes home from work. Their clothes are stained from work with grease, sweat, manure, you name it. They don’t just come in and flop down on the brand new sofa and drag all of that into the house. No. They strip off those dirty clothes, shower and then sit on the new couch. Believers still have sinful natures. They still sin. But they try to avoid sin. Look at the verse immediately following our text: ***“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”*** We know we will get dirty again, but we try not to roll around in it. And at the end of the day, we shed those dirty clothes and clean up. We go to God each morning praying for strength to live lives acceptable to him, and at the end of the day we pray to God to forgive our sins.

And finally, we are living stones who have mouths. ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once 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.”*** What do we say? How about this? Once we were not a people, but now he has made us his people. Once we were not shown mercy, but now we have received mercy from God. We can let them know what it means to be built on Christ.

All of this because of a rock, the capstone stone so many rejected but who makes sure we don’t crumble, the foundation on which we build our hope, the cornerstone who makes sure we acceptable to God, all of this because of Christ, the solid rock; all other ground is sinking sand. Amen.