

Reading: 1Peter 2:2-10 (NIV)

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 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.”[b]

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”[c]

8 and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”[d]

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 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 Are We Building?

When I think of building with stones, I think of some of the amazing stonewalls I’ve seen, those bounding farms in England as well as New England. There is a kind of practicality in the building of these walls – as farmers clear the stones from their fields to prepare them for planting. There is an art to creating those walls as stones are carefully placed, blended together so they form a stable structure. That would have been true of the stones put together to form the walls of the Temple – the temple that was destroyed not too long after Jesus’ death. The Western wall is still standing – a place where people from all over the world come to offer prayers. It is known to some as the wailing wall.

This passage from I Peter would have been written in that time after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. It was a time of turmoil and people who believed in Christ’s message faced persecution. We’re not sure of the details, but the writer of First and Second Peter is encouraging the people to build their faith on a strong foundation. One of the ways he is doing this is grounding this message in older scripture texts such as Psalms, Isaiah and Hosea. Even more important they are reminded that the chief cornerstone of their faith is Jesus. Challengers derided these early believers; why would

they want to follow someone who was crucified as a criminal? The fact that God was faithful and raised Jesus from death overrode those claims for the followers of Jesus. What kinds of resources do people of faith need today to help them withstand the onslaught of criticism for Christianity?

As Peter encourages these new Christians he urges them to be nurtured on 'spiritual milk' – taste God's goodness – be nurtured by God's promises through history – know the stories. As they grow the life of faith, they are encouraged to be "living stones" – the building blocks of a spiritual house. This is a fascinating image. This is a place of community where there is support to ask the questions and to grow in faith. Who are the living stones in this church?

Prayer

Holy, gracious God,

There is so much to be thankful for, for the love which surrounds us, and especially the love of mothers who care for us, nurture us in so many ways. We give thanks too, for all those who surround us and parent us in other ways. On this day we also lift prayers for those mothers who grieve the loss of their children – the mother of Ahmaud Arbery – as well as mothers whose children have died from violence, illness and neglect; mothers in places where poverty and war take a dreadful toll. Holy One, sustain these mothers in their grief and loss. Sometimes our world seems so vulnerable, Holy One, assure us again of your guiding presence.

As we remember your servant Florence Nightingale, we give thanks for her inspiration and for all who have followed in her footsteps to provide their nursing skills and caring especially in this time when their gifts are so needed. We also offer prayers for their families, especially those who are missing the presence of nurses who have to isolate so their families won't be exposed to this virus. We give thanks for our Parish Nurses who reach out especially to those who are alone or in need of a healing presence.

Thanks be for those who are healing – for Susan, and David. We continue our prayers for Jenn, for Barbara, for Sarah and for all who are feeling the loneliness of isolation during this time of pandemic. We celebrate with Charlie and Clari, Charlie's 90th birthday, and ask blessings for them. May we know your love and caring through the caring of those who reach out. Be with all who are grieving that they may know your love and care.

Our prayers continue for the Navaho Nation and for wisdom for all our leaders. Give strength to all who are leading in eradicating the virus in our midst. We pray all these things as well as the prayers in the hearts of the congregation, in Jesus name. Amen