

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday after Trinity, July 8, 2012**

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 465, 473:1-2, 467, 477, 639:1.

Lessons: Psalm 181: 19-25, Acts 4:1-22, Matthew 21:23-46.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 2:4-9.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week you heard Peter telling us *"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."* (1 Peter 2:1-2) You have tasted that the Lord is good. You have heard – some of you repeatedly for decades – that Jesus Christ died for your sins, and that by believing in this you have eternal life waiting for you in heaven. Not only so, but you even now have peace with God, knowing he is not angry with you because of your sins.

Today, please listen as God's Sacred Scripture tells us about

**JESUS CHRIST, THE LIVING STONE**

1. **He was chosen by God and is precious to him.**
2. **He is rejected by men, but is *"A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."***
3. ***"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."***

These verses elaborate on Christ's relationship with believers, using a picture of stones, and a building, a temple. In this text he gives you another picture to help you continue to grow in your salvation.

***"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."***

When we become Christians, when we are born again, we become Christlike. We are little stones compared to Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, and it is Christ's goal to mortar us together into a grand 'building' called the Holy Christian Church. Notice that we are called stones rather than bricks. Bricks are all alike and stones are different in color, texture, size and shape. There is a place for us all in God's building. All the different believers are joined together in the same way that a mosaic is different stones put together to form a beautiful picture.

Jesus is a living stone – the living stone. Isn't that a contradiction? A stone has no life in itself. But God gave life to Jesus – even a second time after he was dead in the grave for three days.

You also are stones, living stones. God has given you life, when you were quickened, born again, regenerated and converted. God gave you life twice – once at your physical birth, again at your rebirth of water and the Word.

In the Mankato area we see stone walls which are homogeneous. They are made from the same kind of stone, often called "Kasota stone", a type of limestone. In some places you see stones of all different kinds in buildings, particularly when a building or wall is made up of field stones of all different kinds. Look at pictures of the holy land to see how many different stones they have. Not all stones are the same. Many are different.

You also are living stones built together. And you know the stones that God uses don't fit together perfectly like bricks. There needs to be some mortar to tie them together. What is it that ties us together? It is

the Word of God that serves as the mortar. And if there is a stone that is not mortared in, not tied together, that stone doesn't stay in place. It works its way loose.

In a building, typically stones have different purposes. Some are used for foundation, some for finish, some just for fill and are not visible. Some are harder than others, some showier than others. But they all have their place. So it is in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the temple into which God has builded you.

Many of the monuments of the Old Testament were piles of stones. Not carved and graven stones, not with words and images on them. Not carefully cut and polished stones like we are accustomed to seeing. They were just piled up.

What a marvelous thing God has done for all who believe. He has taken loose stones and joined them together by the Word of God – the Gospel in the Word and sacraments – to become a great temple. Not only are we stones in that temple, but we are priests! Jesus ended the era of priests of the descendants of Levi. He is our great high priest, and he has made each believer a priest, and that is something we will talk more about next Sunday.

Peter now quotes three Old Testament prophecies that describe the Messiah as a stone, one of which you heard in our Old Testament lesson. ***“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.’”***

In Isaiah 28 God points out that the real foundation of God's people is “him”, that is, Jesus Christ, ***“a chosen and precious cornerstone.”***

Today a cornerstone has mostly a ceremonial purpose, often hollowed out to contain a time capsule of important objects and papers.

Historically, the real purpose of a cornerstone is to start the building straight and square. A cornerstone had to be perfectly square, at least on the two outside corners. It was carved, shaped, and cut for that purpose. Even today, masons start a building at a corner, and build from that point. If the cornerstone isn't square, and isn't placed square, the whole building will be off.

Of course, no one had to cut and shape and form Jesus Christ. He is God's perfect, sinless son. In the same way, Jesus Christ is the standard of straightness in our lives. In a world full of Satan's lies and deceptions, the Word of The Lord remains straight and true. God's Word of law cuts through the excuses, rationalizations, and moral compromises of all time, and holds us all accountable to God's unchanging standards. God's Word of gospel cuts through all Satan's lies about our own worthlessness and despair and holds before us the unchanging love of Jesus to build us up. We are important, we have esteem, yes, even self-esteem because God loves us. That makes us important. Whoever builds his or her life along these true lines will never regret it, neither in this life on earth nor on judgment day.

***“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.’”*** Capstone refers to the top stone of an arch, the keystone. Roman architecture was one of the great features of Roman civilization. Arches were built with wooden forms, and after the stones were put in place, the wooden forms can be taken out.

Jesus is the capstone of our lives. If he is knocked out of that position, our lives collapse. In our Old Testament lesson, the builders were the leaders of the Jewish people. They rejected Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, and God withdrew his hand of mercy from them. They broke their covenant with God one last time and God let the Romans take the nation apart.

As Peter was writing this letter, the one-thousand-year existence of the Jerusalem temple, built by Solomon, was about to come to an end. To crush a Jewish rebellion, the Roman legions in the east, under the command of Titus, laid siege to Jerusalem. When the city fell in A.D. 70, the Romans literally took the temple apart stone by stone in order to destroy Jewish identity. The temple was never rebuilt. And even though Jerusalem today is once again under the military and political control of the nation of Israel, a new temple still cannot be built, for the site has been converted into a holy place for Muslims and contains two of the holiest buildings in all of Islam: The Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque.

Peter also calls Jesus ***“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.”***

Jesus is called a stone or rock of offense, of stumbling. To offend in the scriptural sense is to cause to stumble into sin. The leaders of God's chosen people, the Jews, stumbled and fell when they finally rejected Jesus who was sent as Savior for all men.

Paul too uses the picture of Christ as a stumbling stone and a rock of offense for Israelites who didn't accept Jesus as Savior: ***"They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone.' As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'"*** (Romans 9:32-33)

This verse from our text may make it sound like God predestined some for hell. That is not true, because God our Savior ***"wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:4) Peter is just saying that some people disobey, they reject and don't believe the gospel message and this appoints them to stumble and to be condemned in the judgment. The blame lies on them, not on God.

Paul also elaborates on the picture of Christ as a cornerstone, with each believer having his and her role in God's temple: ***"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."*** (1 Corinthians 3:9-17)

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul writes of our bodies as a temple, encouraging us to live God-pleasing lives. ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."***

You were chosen by God. Jesus was chosen by God. You were elected by God. Jesus was chosen for this purpose: to bring and offer salvation to all mankind. No one but the sinless Son of God could have accomplished what Jesus did: redeeming you from your sins. But he was rejected by the builders. To the builders, the leaders of God's people on earth, God gave a temple through Solomon to illustrate God's presence on earth among them. But they broke God's covenants repeatedly, and in this way forfeited his blessings.

Jesus was rejected by the Jews. That's human nature. All humans reject him by nature. But Jesus was sent first to the Jews.

The Holy Ghost has called you by the gospel, enlightened you with his gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith.

Yes, you are living stones, built on Christ our cornerstone. Our hymn writers have done a great job giving us hymns to celebrate those ideas of Christ as a cornerstone and a foundation stone of believers. But what you have heard so far isn't the end of the picture.

Peter also tells us: ***"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."*** (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Next week we will elaborate on these pictures of all that God has done for you and the tasks he has laid before you as stones in his temple, the Holy Christian Church.

God called you. He did it by the gospel, using the gospel. He wants to continue to feed you so that you may grow and become polished stones in his Holy Christian Church. May God lead us through his Word to be all that he wants us to be. Amen.