

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
May 10, 2020

If... Then...

If Jesus has risen, then I live with purpose.

1 Peter 2:4-10

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 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.”*

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,”*

⁸ and,

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

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.

In Jesus' name, dear fellow redeemed,

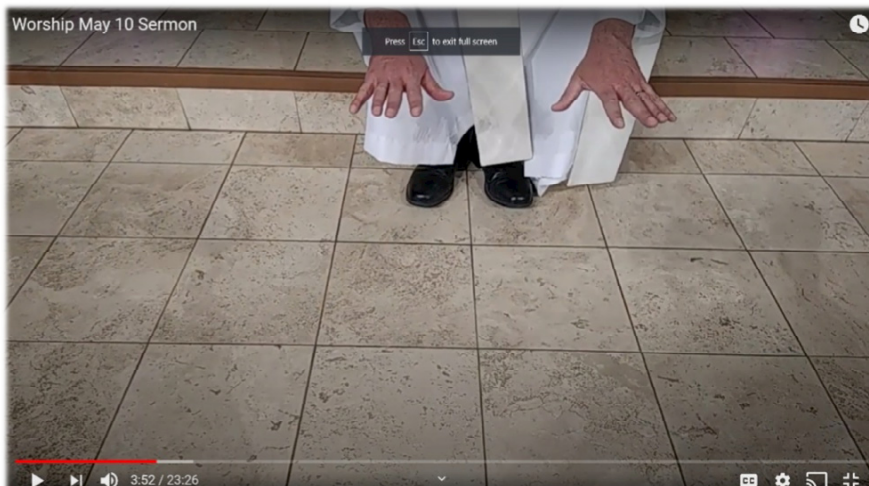
One of the blessings of online worship is that the camera can go where the entire congregation cannot. Let's begin with a close up of the marble stone at the front of our church. Let this remind you of what Peter calls Jesus: “the living Stone—rejected by men chosen by God and precious to him.”



This marble was specially chosen for this purpose. It is precious. It is expensive. If you run your hand over it, it is perfectly smooth.

Isn't this an excellent picture of our Savior every time we walk into our sanctuary? Jesus was chosen by the Father before the creation of the world to be our Savior. He is the foundation stone, Infinitely precious both because he is God

come in flesh and because he loved the Father so that he would give up his life to fulfill God's saving plan. He is the perfect foundation of our faith.



Jesus was the Cornerstone chosen by God the Father. But he was rejected by humans. Peter quoted a couple of Old Testament passages that foretold that the “builders” would reject Jesus and that He would be “stumbling stone” and a “a rock that makes them fall.” Then Peter says something that might be troubling to us: *They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

They were destined to stumble? Does mean that God chose them to disobey? Not at all. Allow me to use a wine glass to illustrate.



Do you think that the person who made this wine glass decided in advance that it should break on this marble stone floor? I don't think so. They made it for people to use it properly, to enjoy wine with it.

But do you think if I drop this wine glass, it will break on this marble stone? Of course! You can foretell it is going to break, but it wasn't made for the specific purpose of breaking.

In the same way, Peter says that God foretold that people would reject the Cornerstone. Don't be surprised! They are “destined” for it, not because God predestined or decided in advance that they should reject it, but because that is the consequence of rejecting of the Savior.

But for us who believe that Jesus is the Cornerstone of our faith, the picture is very different. Here, let's move to one of the most significant architectural features of our church building: The stone wall behind the altar. Peter says that we 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.”

Isn't this wall a beautiful picture of this truth? It rises out of the marble "Cornerstone." In contrast to the marble stone, none of these stones is perfect. They were just worthless stones, picked from the fields of our members. But they are precious because they have been chosen to be a part of God's house.



Isn't that true of us as well! We are not precious because of our perfection, but because God chose us. Go back to the first verses of this letter. Peter says that we have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. We are chosen, not because of who we are, but because of God's grace, his love for us before the creation of the world.

And each of these precious, chosen stones, is permanently part of God's house. Peter says in the first chapter that we are kept by the power of our God. While we don't have the strength to stay in God's Church, God's power is like the mortar that has the strength to protect us and keep us safe in his Church.

Look at this wall and remember God has chosen you to be a living stone and has built you to be his temple, his spiritual house.

But that is not all. Peter says we have a purpose in this house. "To be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

A priest in the Old Testament had direct access to God. This is the blessing that is ours through Christ. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sin that makes it possible to live in the presence of our holy God.

A priest also offered sacrifices. But what are the spiritual sacrifices of which Peter wrote? On this Mother's Day weekend, I'd like to read Proverbs 31 to help us see the kinds of spiritual sacrifices that our mothers and wives offer up to God.

In Proverbs 31:1, we hear that this chapter was taught to King Lemuel by his mother. We aren't sure who Lemuel is, probably another name for Solomon. But here a mother is teaching her son what a godly woman is like, what offerings she give to her God?

¹⁰ A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.

¹² She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.

¹³ She selects wool and flax
and works with eager hands.

Today she selects cotton and makes face masks.

¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.

¹⁵ She gets up while it is still night;
she provides food for her family
and portions for her female servants.

She sets puts food on the table for us to eat.

¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

She shops for us.

¹⁷ She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.

She cleans the house.

¹⁸ She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.

¹⁹ In her hand she holds the distaff
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

On top of the household work, she probably has her own work to do.

²⁰ She opens her arms to the poor
and extends her hands to the needy.

She is generous.

²¹ When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

²² She makes coverings for her bed;
she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

She buys us clothes and makes sure they are clean.

²³ Her husband is respected at the city gate,
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.



- ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them,
and supplies the merchants with sashes.
²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.
²⁶ She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

She has become the teacher of her children.

- ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

She changes diapers, sweeps the floor, and drives the kids to all their appointments.

- ²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
²⁹ “Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”
³⁰ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
³¹ Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

I placed the objects on the altar as I read because these are as much spiritual offerings given to God as the offerings we put on the altar. Our priestly service isn't just the church things we do, it is everything that we do.

But I know that many women don't like Proverbs 31. They are caught in the trap of comparison. I get caught in that trap too. Others do more than I do. Others do things better than I do. So all of these sacrifices just aren't good enough.

Please read over 1 Peter 2:5 a number of times to make this truth your own. Your offerings aren't acceptable because they are better than someone else's or that they are “good enough.” They are acceptable because of Jesus. *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.***

That's why I wanted to preach from behind the altar, not only to lay these things on the altar, but to be here, under the cross. All that we offer to God is acceptable because he looks at it through Christ.

Think of how this makes everything we do have meaning and purpose. Everything we do is an offering to our God, and it is acceptable to him because he looks at everything we do through the blood of his Son, our Savior. All is forgiven. All is acceptable. All is precious. If Jesus has risen from the dead, your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The text closes by reminding us of who we are. Let's read it together.

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.

We all have a story to tell. Once we were in darkness. We have all lived in the darkness and guilt of comparison. But now we have been brought into the wonderful light that what we do is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. There are countless people around us who struggle with the same darkness of comparison.

May God grant us the wisdom to recognize people in that darkness. May he give us the courage to admit we have been in that darkness too. May we proclaim the praises of the One who is the Cornerstone of our Faith, the one who by God's grace has made us a permanent part of his eternal home, the one who looks upon all we do through the blood of his Son. We are priests and all we do has infinite meaning and value. Amen.

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My Next Steps

- **Celebrate a Mother's priestly calling:** In Proverbs 31:10-31. King Lemuel's mother encourages her son to appreciate the gift of a woman who fears the LORD. She lists some of the things a godly woman would do about 1000 BC. Read Proverbs 31:10-31 with this question: What are the things that your mother does or has done that makes you praise God for her? Make a list like King Lemuel's mother did. If possible, share it with your mother.
- **Celebrate a Mother's priestly sacrifice:** No one fulfills any role perfectly. You can always find someone who does something better than you. But what makes a mother's sacrifice acceptable to God? Memorize 1 Peter 2:5 as your answer: "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."

GroupWork: Celebrate Your Priestly Calling

1. Get the conversation started. Discuss one of the following:
 - What is your favorite memory about your mother? Or
 - What makes the role of a mother especially challenging in our Safer-at-Home world?
2. Read Proverbs 31:1,10-31. King Lemuel's mother encourages her son to appreciate the gift of a woman who fears the LORD. Christian women say that this chapter makes them feel guilty because they compare themselves with the woman described here. Do you think that comparison trap is a common problem among Christian women and men? Why do people fall into that trap?
3. How might these passages help us battle that comparison trap?
 - Romans 7:18-19
 - Romans 8:1
 - 1 Peter 2:5
4. Christians are part of a "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5). Priests in the Old Testament offered up sacrifices to God. What are our New Testament sacrifices?
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - Philippians 4:18
 - Hebrews 13:15-16
5. Close by celebrating your identity as God's New Testament people. Read together this adaptation of 1 Peter 2:9-10.

We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. Amen.