



Sermon: 14th May 2017

Living Stones

1 Peter 2: 2 – 10; John 14: 1 – 14

Have you noticed how often stones are mentioned in the Bible, how often they have a central role in the Bible stories. There are the tablets of stone on which the 10 commandments were engraved. There is the stone which Jacob used as a pillow before he wrestled with God. There is the stone from which the water sprang in the Desert when Moses struck it with his staff. There are the stones of the temple which the disciples marvelled over. There is, of course, that famous stone which was rolled away on Easter morning. And today, we read that Jesus is the cornerstone on which the temple was built and we are stones, with the living stones out of which the temple is constructed.

The physical Temple in Jerusalem over which the disciples marvelled was destroyed in 70AD – in all likelihood around the time this letter was written, which makes the description of the spiritual Temple a very evocative one. The temple was to be replaced, but not with stone, rather it was to be created from people. Quoting from Isaiah and the Psalms, the author of this letter makes the startling claim that in building this spiritual temple it is the very stone that was rejected that has become the cornerstone. This spiritual Temple is the spiritual home of a new chosen race, God's own people. But God's own people are now not just Jews, but refers to everyone who has been, according to the author in verse 9, 'called out of darkness into his own marvellous light'.

God has chosen Jesus and appointed him as the cornerstone, as the very stone that sets the line of the building. The cornerstone is the most important stone. It determines the position of the whole building and if it is not set correctly the building will be built out of alignment. It is the standard and the judge by which all other stories are measured.

So, if we are the living stones out of which this temple is built, what does it mean that Jesus is the Cornerstone? I think it means that what we are called to, when we are called out of darkness into light, is to align ourselves, our views and our values with Jesus Christ the cornerstone; align ourselves with his will and way. And that is the challenge for us as God's people. How do we measure up? How does God judge us? How fully and well

aligned are we with he who is the Cornerstone? His is the standard against which we are measured and by which we are judged.

But I think there's more to being a spiritual Temple than just aligning

ourselves with the model of living that Jesus gave us, important though that is.

If we think about the temple in the Jerusalem, we might recall those stones which the disciples commented upon, such huge stones. We might remember that this temple, this beautiful building, notwithstanding the size of the stones, was destroyed. We might consider that this physical Temple, albeit made of dead stones, was the sign and the symbol of the presence of God amongst his people. Now we are the Temple; we who are the living stones joined to and aligned with the Cornerstone Jesus Christ. So now we are the sign of God's presence; we are the place where God dwells; we are the place where people will discover God, find God's welcome, know God's reality, and be themselves drawn to offer themselves as living stones in this spiritual building.

Peter says, 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'.

A building, a race, a priesthood, a nation... God's own people!

That's who we are!

That's who we are in Campsie.

That's who we are as the Church of Scotland.

That's who we are as the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We are the church. We are the true building. We are this chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people.

But the challenge then is to what extent we reflect and live out that given reality? The question already asked, remains; how fully and well aligned are we with he who is the Cornerstone? It is a challenge and a question that might be put to us here in Campsie and also as the Church of Scotland – God's witness throughout this land.

If we are the living stones built together into this spiritual house of which Peter speaks then what kind of house or temple has God been able to construct with and of us? In the gospel of John, Jesus tells us that his father's house has many mansions, where all are welcome. As the living stones of Christ can we build a house of many mansions? A place where there is a place for everyone?

Will people find God in this building that we are? Will people find a welcome and a home within this building that we are? Campsie, the Church of Scotland?

I know that people do find grace, generosity, welcome, love, space in this Temple in which we are living stones and I have no doubt that still more will if and as we allow ourselves to be continually built into God's spiritual house, if and as we come and come again and keep returning to the one who is the Living Stone; if and as we are transformed by his presence within and among us; if and as we remain aligned with the Cornerstone who is Jesus Christ.

We who have come to that Living Stone who is Jesus Christ the Lord, are being built together as living stones into a spiritual house.

We are being made into a place where people will find the presence of God.

We are a sign and symbol of God's presence to all around.

We are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

We are to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light...

We are God's own people!