



## **The cornerstone of life**

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson, in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 14, 2017

*Come to him, a living stone, rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2: 4-5*

The early Christians lived in a time of great persecution and Stephen was among seven who were deacons serving tables and caring for widows and orphans. Having preached a powerful sermon that angered the members of the Sanhedrin, Stephen was arrested and without trial was stoned to death, making him the first Christian martyr. It is a testament to the power of Stephen's faith that he did not hold this against them. Standing by and consenting to his death was Saul who fought against Christians until after his conversion when he changed his name to Paul and became a fighter for Christ.

Saint Peter writes during the time of persecution of Christians. He knows that if they are to succeed in enduring hardship, they have to know what they believe and why. Peter uses the metaphor of Christians as building blocks in the spiritual house of God with Christ as the chief cornerstone. As the people of God we are living stones of faith committed to living out the gospel of Christ in all times and places.

You and I form this community of living stones in witness to the power of faith. Each time we stand against oppression, each time we stand against hatred, prejudice, and intolerance, we are building blocks in the great household of God. One stone by itself is of little use until it is set in the wall of a building. Likewise, acting alone we are limited in what we can do until we join together to build up the strength and effectiveness of the church to make a difference in the world.

Growing up in the nation's capital, I watched much of the construction of our Washington National Cathedral. The building of that great Cathedral began in 1907 with the laying of the foundation stone from the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Construction continued for the next eighty-three years until it was completed in 1990. During construction, the Indiana limestone blocks were set out on the grounds like pieces of a huge jigsaw puzzle. Each stone was numbered in designation for a particular place in the building. Those stones by themselves were of no use until they were set in place. Today, the Washington Cathedral is a means for people to be fed spiritually in a city that feeds on political power. It was there that my high school baccalaureate was held and later I was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood. On a journey to the Holy Land, I felt the connection with the stones at "wailing wall" of the great temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The stones of that ancient temple are an important link with our spiritual ancestry.

Next time you are out front take a look the cornerstone of our church. Think of the first generation that built this church. Think of succeeding generations that made this place a vital center

for worship, education, witness and mission. We in our present generation are living stones that bear the responsibility of keeping our parish strong and healthy.

On this Mother's Day we remember that an essential cornerstone of our lives is our mother who gave birth to us and nurtured us. No matter how long or how short our mother was a part of our life she was central to the development of our character. From the beginning we knew we were loved. From her we learned right from wrong, truth from falsehood and to stand up for what we believe is right and good and just.

It is essential that all of us maintain a strong commitment to building up of our parish. We are vital living stones in building up the household of God. Alone we can do little; working together we can accomplish great things. You can complain all you want about organized religion and church hierarchies, but the committed faith of generations of Christians working together has accomplished great good in the world. Our mission is to proclaim Christ as the way, the truth and the life. In a world in which we can become so distracted and lose our direction and find ourselves groping our way in the dark, Christ lights the way for us.

Real greatness is found in working together using our gifts and abilities. We are a talented parish. Whatever we accomplish takes extraordinary effort to respond to God's extraordinary call. In answering God's call to serve, we are part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation called out of the darkness of ignorance, fear, and intolerance to the light of knowledge, courage and compassion. We take risks and learn from our mistakes. No matter in what conditions we find ourselves, we are strengthened in the knowledge that we are empowered by God.

In the gospel of John, Jesus describes the expansive breadth, length, and height of God's realm as an expansive house inside of which there are many mansions. There is room for everyone to have a dwelling place in the household of God. The next time you become exasperated with the hypocrisy of church people, remember that if there is room for us, there is room for them.

God has a way of forcing us out of our complacency to test our strength and resolve. When we welcome new members to join our life together, they are added to the building blocks set in place in witness to the strength and power of Christ's love in the world. If we truly believe in the expansiveness of God's love, we have to know when to comfort the afflicted and when to afflict the comfortable. This is what gives us the power to be different in an indifferent world. Daring to be different is its own reward just as failure to stand up for what is right is its own punishment.

We all have the choice. We can win people to Christ by good example or we can turn them off by a poor example. Christians are known by the way we treat others, especially those who can't do anything for us in return. Such is the ultimate test for us to put what we believe into practice.