

## ***What the world throws away, God collects and blesses***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

May 10, 2020, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

by Rev. Dave Le Grand



Touring around the modern-day Sea of Galilee in Israel, a tourist will come across sites like the one you see in this photo of Holy Ground stone church (Josh Bizzell, Photographer). Signs informing you that you are looking at something holy. Well, this one tells us that we are on “a” holy ground; this rock said to be the site where Jesus waited on the beach for his disciples after his death, cooked for them on this rock and

assured them that he was not dead, but, in fact about to be resurrected.

Remarkable, isn't it, stones weathering the rigours of time to help tell the stories of tragedy, and celebration?

Whether or not this was the literal site of that event, this stone and sign invite us to think about, reflect. Today's letter from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter presents two intriguing metaphors – babies in faith, drinking milk, and stones (living stones), rejected by the world, but then used by God to construct God's spiritual house.

Building on these ideas, the writer presents references to Psalms and words of the Prophets all from the Hebrew Bible. It seems that this letter was intended for new followers of Jesus in Asia Minor where the church is expanding, but Gospel isn't yet welcomed. The hearers feel disoriented, and so the letter points them, us, to our Jewish Scripture roots, God's people who themselves felt at times like cast away stones, and had to be reminded that God had a plan in these times of struggle; God is creating something new and wonderful with such stones.

The word for stone that recurs in this passage – Greek “lithos” – is not the same as the word Jesus uses when he tells Peter that he will be the “rock” on which the church is built. The *Living Stones* referred to here are at first discarded, the world has no use for them, but, in God's eyes they... we, are precious.

Metaphors are rich, evocative. They are open to possibility, and encourage us to imagine, and to continually re-imagine our identity and our relationship with God as we navigate our life with its joys and challenges.

Living in exile from our physical connectedness in worship, disconnected from our church sanctuaries; perhaps this is a great opportunity, space if you will, to ground ourselves in *our* ancient Jewish and Christian traditions. People who often felt disconnected, in exile, unappreciated.

Scholar William Loder reflects on this passage, pointing out that God's promise shining through this passage is for a whole community, not just hope for an individual. Loder suggests that,

“the stone imagery invites us... to see ourselves together as not a random pile of ...stones strewn across the landscape of interim territory, but as stones belonging to a structure built on Christ. It is a wonderful image of belonging. It invites us to our own imaginings... Stones are old, young, brittle, strong, shiny... differently shaped and oriented – there’s room for everyone.”<sup>1</sup>

So... who is invited to be part of this all-inclusive Christ community? God needs diverse living stones – different sizes, colours. People who don’t at all feel worthy – you are a living stone. You who are still in your pyjamas, clicked on this worship by accident and you don’t feel really churchy – God needs you. You are a living stone. You who are in your Sunday best because this routine of worship is very important to you – you are a living stone that God needs as well. Some living stones are well educated, some didn’t finish high school.

Doesn’t our world need diverse communities where everyone belongs like this passage suggests? A community comprised of humble, authentic, honest people who think that they want to follow Jesus, maybe asking questions. You may not be sure about what you believe, but maybe you do believe that there is a God out there and we need a God who is up to something and transformative in this world.

We talk a lot at St. Andrew’s about connecting with our neighbours, the very vulnerable downtown population – people who have sporadic housing at best, some facing addictions, some who themselves feel disposable. Barbara K. Lundblad recounts an experience of worship hosted by Union Seminary in New York City. A seminary student there worked with a group called *Picture the Homeless* as her thesis project. The student got to know people accustomed to living on the streets.

She planned a service with some of her new friends, a service to remember the hundreds of people who were buried in a particular New York cemetery where many graves had no names. So, the day came for the service; some of the leaders of that service could not read, so they had to memorize their parts. The service was deeply moving, and as it came to a close, each congregant was asked to write the name of a homeless person on a purple Post-it sticky note. A large sheet was stretched out across the front, with names written all over it, randomly, names like “John & Jane Doe”, and “Baby Doe”. Heart wrenching.

After congregants had written on the Post-its (among them were people who lived on the streets, and who knew very well that their friends were in this cemetery), people each brought forward their Post-it notes, and stuck it over top of one of those generic “Baby.. or Jane... or John Doe” names. Funny thing about Post-it sticky notes, they fall off easily. Dawn, one of the leaders in this service, resolved to replace the Post-its as they happened to fall off. Every time a Post-it fell off, she stuck it back on. Time and time, and time again she did this – she did not sit down until every name was in place.

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<sup>1</sup> William Loader, <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/AEpEaster5.htm>. Commentary on 1 Peter 2: 2-10

When that sheet was held up to face the congregation, it turned out that the generic names were not at all random – the Post-its spelled out the words: “WE ARE HERE”. God, my friends, is gathering each of us in our uniqueness, our insecurities, our sense of disconnection and uncertainty in these COVID-19 times.

We are all God’s community, each of us living stones. We might feel pretty insignificant at times. To God, though, we are told today, to God, all are so very precious. Amen.



**Saint Clement’s Church, Isle of Harris – [prayingthelectionary.life](http://prayingthelectionary.life)**