

Service notes and sermon for Easter 5, May 10, 2020

Overview: The creative, sustaining Word of Christ brings people into fellowship with the true God and fits them as living stones into the spiritual temple of God, the holy Church.

Suggested Service is Service of the Word (CW p. 38).

Suggested Hymns: 343 “Christ Is the World’s Light”

529 “Built on the Rock”

158 “I Am Content! My Jesus Lives Again”

153 “Alleluia! Jesus Lives”

\* Please feel free to sing additional hymns from the Easter section: CW 141-168.

Prayer of the Day: O God, you form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the many changes of this world, our hearts may ever yearn for the lasting joys of heaven; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

First Lesson: Acts 17:1-12 Luke charts the progress of the Word preached by Paul. In Thessalonica, the Word is met with joy by some, but stirs up the ire of Jews who become jealous of its progress. Moving on from Thessalonica to Berea, Paul preaches the Word to people “of more noble character.” The Bereans compared the message they heard with the written Word. In so doing they find Christ, the heart of the Old Testament prophecy and New Testament proclamation.

Psalm is Psalm 33 (CW p. 79) The Church sings of her heavenly Bridegroom, who upholds all things by his Word for the sake of his Bride.

Second Lesson: I Peter 2:4-10 Christ, the “living Stone,” builds up his people like living stones into a spiritual house. Jesus is “rejected by men but chosen by God,” and he makes his people into a holy priesthood to the glory of God. This is all the work of God’s mercy in Christ. Calling sinners to himself, he recreates them as his “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” that they may declare his praises now and in eternity.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord. Alleluia. (John 14:6)

Gospel: John 14:1-12 As Jesus speaks words of farewell to his disciples Maundy Thursday evening, he comforts and assures them of his continuing care. For he is the way, the truth, and the life. Knowing and trusting in him, his disciples have every spiritual blessing and have seen the Father.

Sermon Theme: GOD BUILDS HIS HOUSE

Prayer: CW p. 126. Lord's Prayer: CW p. 43.

Sermon Text: I Peter 2:4-10 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. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him shall never be put to shame” (Isaiah 28:16). 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,” (Psalm 118:22) and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (Isaiah 8:14). They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But 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.

I PETER 2:4-10

ASCENSION

5/10/2020

GOD BUILDS HIS HOUSE

EASTER 5

MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

Early in the history of the New Testament church, Peter writes these words of our text in his first general epistle to the early Christians. Many of these early Christians were being persecuted. Many were being tempted to slide back into their former ways. Some were wondering if their new life in Christ and their hope of the resurrection was really worth it. The pressures that were all around them to forsake the gospel and to despair of their joy in the gospel was evident in their lives and in their actions. Peter writes to encourage them, to instruct them, and to strengthen them in their lives of faith; and for the difficult times that any Christian will face while living in a sinful world.

Today much is the same. God's church continues to struggle against the forces of this world, against the devil himself, and even against our own sinful flesh. The pressures we face in our modern society are every bit as faith threatening and soul endangering as the persecutions faced by the early church. The materialism of our day has become like the forbidden apple of a tree that cannot be resisted. Left to our own devices, without the help and aid of the Holy Spirit, who would stand in the test of time to join our Lord and Savior in the heavenly realms?

You and I also need the instruction, the encouragement and the strength that is given through these words of Scripture. You and I also need to be reminded that the God is

still in charge; that Jesus completed our redemption, and has risen and ascended to heaven. The church today, the church of our God, is still as it was in early days after Christ's resurrection. What was true then is still true today, GOD BUILDS HIS HOUSE. God still builds his spiritual house. I. He builds it with Jesus as the cornerstone II. He builds it with you and me as the stones and III. The house is still filled with spiritual sacrifices.

The church is still built on Christ. He is the cornerstone. He is the centerpiece. He is the main focus. He is the object on which the entire church stands or falls. If there is no Christ there is no church in the eyes of God. One could not forsake the gospel of Christ, deny his death or resurrection, or find salvation apart from him and still be in the church that God builds. God builds his church on Christ; and Jesus is the only way to the Father and the only way to know the true God.

The Bible has used many analogies to teach us that Jesus is the heart and center of the God's Church. Jesus is the foundation, he is the capstone, he is the stone the builders rejected. Jesus is the vine, he is the shepherd, he is the living water, he is the way, the truth and the life, as we heard in our gospel reading. Here Peter calls him the "Living Stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone and the capstone." All these show that in the building of God's house, Jesus is essential.

Peter calls him the "Living Stone." It is interesting that the Greek word Peter here uses is "lithos", referring to a stone that was used for building. This is in contrast with "petra," a large rock or boulder. And that this is a living stone. It is full of life. And it is life-giving. Jesus, the living Stone, is so much an animate object. He is not like a brick or a board or a block of cement. He is the living Stone.

This points to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is alive! Jesus is living and active. He is a part of us and we are a part of him by faith in him. The church is not built on dead orthodoxy and it is not built simply on history. It is built on the living and enduring Word of God, which is Jesus, the Word of God incarnate; who came to live and to suffer and die for you and for me. The message of Easter is that Jesus is alive; and because he lives you and I also live. Our hope and our trust and our faith is built on a living Stone, the Savior, Jesus Christ. He was chosen by God for this very purpose and God continues to this day to build his church on Jesus as the cornerstone.

The reminder here for us is the same as for those early Christians who first received this letter. Among all the distractions of this world and the pressures of this life, we need to be reminded that Jesus is the basis for our faith, the foundation of God's Church and the cornerstone of our lives. If ever and whenever we lose sight of this basic fact or allow the world and its concerns to crowd it out of our hearts and minds, then we will flounder as individuals before God and as a congregation of God.

Secondly, you are the stones. “You also like living stones are being build into a spiritual house.....” You have been chosen for the building of God’s house. You will know this by your faith in Christ, by your desire to be like him, and by your trust in him. You are a part of the building material. You are being shaped and formed and matured for the building of God’s house.

Yes, many have rejected this Savior. And yes, many of us may wonder, why am I the one who is here praising God in this physical house of worship on this particular day? It is because God has chosen you to be a part of his house. The Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel, enlightened you with spiritual gifts, sanctified and kept you in the one true faith, that you may be a part of this spiritual house of God.

Citing the picture of heaven and God’s eternal kingdom, Peter quotes from Isaiah: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trust in him will never be put to shame.”

You and I are the stones in the building of God’s spiritual house, that gathering together of all believers, who will one day be gathered together in the eternal kingdom of heaven. You are the ones who trust in Jesus and will never be put to shame; because you will not be left to your sins on the Day of Judgment. You will be found to be pure and white as snow through the blood of Jesus, your Savior. God has chosen you to build his house.

This same Jesus, who is precious to you and me and to the Father who sent him, was rejected by his own when he came into the world. He was rejected by men for the building of God’s house. They wanted nothing to do with him. They wanted to build God’s house apart from Jesus. This same rejection continues in our day. But God chose Jesus before time to be the Savior and has made him the capstone. He has set Jesus above all in the building of his house. Jesus is the head, as well as the foundation and the cornerstone on which the house of God is built.

Many still reject Jesus. They attempt to come to Father apart from him. They do not acknowledge him as the only Savior from sin and the Lord of their lives. The simple message of Christ crucified for all mankind is foolishness to them and a message that causes many to stumble and fall. The simple message of the gospel, the free and faithful grace of God is too much for the natural man to believe on his own. They stumble and fall and are not chosen to be used in the building of God’s house.

Then notice what Peter calls those who have been called to faith in Christ and who have put their hope and trust in him and who are being used to build his house. “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” These are the living stones that God uses to build his house.

You are the living stones—you and all those whom God has bought to faith in Jesus alone and are being used to build God’s spiritual house. This spiritual house today is still filled with spiritual sacrifices.

At first it may sound a little strange to think of ourselves as making sacrifices. We usually think that that is what God’s people did in the Old Testament. They offered the blood of animals on the altar of God in sacrifice to God. Those sacrifices pointed ahead to the one great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood that was once and for all. It is true that we do not offer such sacrifices anymore. Jesus did pay the price once and for all. There is no need for such sacrifice, for the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Yet, Peter says that you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.” You might say then, that God’s house still has sacrifices. It is you and I who are offering the sacrifices. It is not the slain beasts on the altar; but rather ourselves as living sacrifices, dedicated to God and to the service of our Lord and Savior in his holy house. Paul said in Romans 12:1, “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Also, the writer to the Hebrews tells us in 13:15, “Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” We are the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of our God who has called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light. As such, we are the stones that God uses to build his house.

We might say that God’s house, his church, has always required sacrifice of one kind or another. In the Old Testament, sacrifices pointed ahead to the promise of the Savior. When Jesus came, he himself was the sacrifice of God for the sin of all mankind. Our sacrifice today, our spiritual sacrifice to God is in view of the mercy of God and the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. God’s house is still filled with sacrifices because God’s people, like living stones, continue to offer themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God, holy and pleasing in his sight. God’s people continue to turn away from the world, to reject sin and resist temptation; that they may sacrifice to God in praise, in service, and in life.

It has never been easy for God’s Church and the building of his house in this dangerously sinful world—not in the past and not in the future. Yet, it is God who builds his house and he does it through people like you and me. He builds them on Jesus, the cornerstone, using you and me as living stones, to build his house still filled with spiritual sacrifices. AMEN.

Happy Mother’s Day to all the mothers out there!