

# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “LIVING STONES”

Scripture Lesson: 1 Peter 2: 1-10

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, May 4, 2025  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### 1 Peter 2: 1-10

#### The Living Stone and a Chosen People

1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5 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. 6 For it stands in scripture:

*"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

7 To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,  
*"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the very head of the corner,"*

8 and

*"A stone that makes them stumble,  
and a rock that makes them fall."*

*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God's people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.

#### Living Stones

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

This morning, we celebrate one of the great milestones of church life: confirmation. It's a day when faith becomes personal, when promises once spoken for these young people at their baptism are now spoken by them. It's also a day when we, as a church, remember who we are—how we got here, and what kind of stones we're laying down for those who come next.

And speaking of stones, Joshua 4—which \_\_\_ read for us this morning—brings us to a dramatic moment in the history of God's people. The people of Israel have crossed the Jordan River on dry land. This must have been an extraordinary reminder of the beginning of their sojourn in the wilderness—another occasion when the waters had parted and God's people had walked upon dry ground.

Now, before the waters return in this case, God commands them to do something we may find peculiar: "Go and grab a rock." Joshua puts it like this: "Take twelve stones from the riverbed and stack them on the shore as a memorial."

And why, we may ask? It is because generations would come who didn't see the water part, and they would need reminders. Seeing the stones on display, they would be prompted to ask, "What do these stones mean?" Then the story would be told again—the story of God's power, faithfulness, and guidance. At a basic level, those stones help ensure that the people never forget where they came from and who brought them through it.

Here at First (Scots), we claim our own ancient stones, don't we? I've been told that our graveyard contains more than 50 stones that date back earlier than 1800. In fact, some of the oldest bricks and stones in Charleston support this very sanctuary, which was built in 1814—that's 211 years ago! And when one considers that it has endured wars, hurricanes, and earthquakes, it becomes a powerful testimony to God's faithfulness.

Of course, the stones of First (Scots) are also metaphorical, and include stories, traditions, mission trips, and pews warmed by generations of faithful saints. The prophet Samuel makes it clear to the people of God—both then and now—that part of our charge, part of our calling, is to remember. Not just to look back, mind you, but to actually anchor ourselves in God's past faithfulness as we move into God's future promises.

About \_\_ years separated the \_\_\_\_\_ from the disciple Peter, who wrote this morning's New Testament lesson. Still, the metaphor of stones looms large. But Peter has shifted his focus—he's not as concerned with stone monuments as he is with living stones.

"Like living stones," he says, "let yourselves be built into a spiritual house." When Peter says this, he is letting us know that faith is not simply a matter of remembering what God has done; it is also about recognizing what God is doing in the community of faith right now.

This morning, we celebrate some of the newest members of our church family—from the members of our Confirmation Class who are going into 9th grade to Fran \_\_\_\_, who is now in her 90th year. These new members are not spectators. They're not just signing the membership roll and going through the motions. We believe and affirm that they are being built into something real, something lasting. They are, as it were, the newest "stones" that God is using to build His church.

And here's where good Reformed Theology adds to the richness of our convictions. John Calvin once wrote, "The church is the mother of all believers," which is to say that we are formed in community. One stone does not make a house. But together—by the mercy of Jesus and, let's call it, the mortar of the Holy Spirit, God's work of sanctification in our life and in our life together—through these gifts of grace, we become the church.

As living stones of a living church, each of us contributes to the building of this living and breathing expression of God's kingdom. Maybe like a main entrance, ours is a kind and gracious hospitality—the first face that someone sees—a greeter, an usher, a member of the Fellowship Committee. Some of us may be more tucked away, providing foundational support, perhaps through such ministries as our Legacy 1731 Society. Still, for others of us, it may be serving in countless and collaborative ways—stone upon stone—becoming stronger together than we could ever be apart.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer took this idea in a slightly different direction, writing, "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others." The implication being that living stones don't exist to be admired. They exist to hold others up. They carry weight. They provide shelter. They create space.

There is a beautiful Catholic cathedral in Chartres, France. Construction began in the year 1194 and was completed in 1252—imagine a 58-year-long building project! Chartres Cathedral is known for many things, not least of which are its magnificent medieval stained-glass windows. Also, the tallest of its two towers stands at an incredible 371 feet, more than double the height of either of our bell towers.

It has been said that some years ago, during a restoration project, workers examining one of the ancient stone walls discovered something strange. There was a single spot—roughly at eye level—where one stone was missing. At first, they assumed it had fallen out or eroded over time. But as they examined the surrounding structure, they realized that the wall hadn't collapsed. On the contrary, it was as strong as ever.

Then someone found an inscription carved into a nearby stone, written in Latin. It translated roughly to: "Here is where the next generation's stone belongs." It turned out that the builders had left a space—not due to accident, but as a gesture of faith. They trusted that someone would come later to continue the work. They had made room for the next generation to build.

In so many ways, that's what we are doing today. Our Confirmands, for example, might be seen as the "next stone" in the living wall of the church. Indeed, in every generation, the saints of this church have made space for the next stone—sometimes by teaching Sunday school, sometimes by serving on Session, and sometimes by simply showing up with love and patience.

It should be clear by now that the stones we are talking about don't just sit around. They move. They encourage. They tell stories. They shout and give praise to God. They build each other up.

As Peter puts it, we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." And for what purpose? Peter explains: "In order that [we] may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light."

When Peter says that, he is reminding us that the church is by no means finished. It is alive, and every new believer becomes part of the structure that God is building in Jesus Christ, which is a spiritual house of living stones.

This morning, we are fortunate to have a temporary electric organ in place of our regular organ—and if you haven't noticed, that's a good thing! Our regular organ is going through a scheduled and comprehensive refurbishment and will be back at the end of the summer. And that's okay too, because, as we all know, the church's one foundation is not the pipes, as much as we love them—it is Jesus Christ her Lord.

One of the questions I remember the organ commission considering early on in the process was whether ours should be a refurbishment project or a full replacement—an entirely new instrument. It didn't take the commission long to decide that our existing organ is really quite wonderful and didn't need to be discarded. And that good decision helps ensure that the generation to come will be able to enjoy something of the same beautiful music that we have enjoyed. In that way, even our music is prepared for the future.

Speaking of music, our closing hymn this morning, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, is one of my favorites. In that hymn, there is the line, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." That word comes to us from a time when the prophet Samuel took a stone and set it up as a memorial between Mizpah and Shen in order to commemorate God's provision. He called the stone Ebenezer, which in Hebrew means "stone of help," because he didn't want the people to forget from where their help came. He didn't want them to forget that it was God who had delivered them from their arch nemesis, the Philistines.

He wanted the people of God to remember—for generations to come—that even though they would still be prone to wander, God was forever in the business of drawing them back and sealing upon their very hearts a love for Him that was everlasting.

God has been so good to us. May we raise our figurative Ebenezer! May we be the kind of stones that are not silent but cry out! May we, as Confirmands, as parents, as lifelong members, and everything in between—may we be like living stones in this, God's House.

As we remember, as we build, as we sing, may we know and believe that God is not done. The foundation is Christ, the cornerstone—make no mistake about that—but the structure includes you and me. And ours, by the grace of God, is a legacy that will last.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.