

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2011

Fifth in Easter

SCRIPTURES: 1 Peter 1:22-2:10; John 14:1-14

"Having a Place"

"Like living stones / let selves be built into spiritual house"

As many of you know, there was a time, now over fifty years ago, when my father and his brother shared a brick and stone contracting business. My father left the business in the early 1960s and his brother continued it. My cousin Rick still runs Schroeder Brick and Stone to this day. While Jenny and I were in Indiana visiting our family it was suggested that we drive past a building site near my sister's home to get a look at Rick's latest project, a 12,000 square foot special order castle/house that he is laying the exterior stone on for one of the wealthiest couples in southern Indiana. The stone that Rick is laying consists of rectangular dressed blocks of irregular dimensions, so that as he is laying the stone Rick is also arranging the pieces in a rather complex jigsaw pattern. The end result is that there will be no repeating pattern discernable in the stone walls. When I spoke to my uncle Harold, Rick's father, about the project, he mentioned that Rick had already laid six semi-loads of stone and that he still had four semi-loads to go. The result is really quite beautiful, although I fail to comprehend why two people would need 12,000 square feet of living space configured into a house of eight bedrooms and eleven bathrooms.

In the first letter of Peter to the early church, we are told that we should come to Christ who the author characterizes as the cornerstone of a great structure, and that we should allow ourselves to be built into that structure as living stones ourselves. The structure itself becomes the church universal, encompassing all time and space. Now as I tried to envision this concept myself, I thought about my cousin Rick, a master mason, taking stones, no two of which have exactly the same dimensions, and carefully fitting them together, one after another; at times setting a stone aside and choosing another but seldom if ever discarding a stone, until the completed building is attained.

Friends, this is the household of God, eternal to point of transcending time itself, of which Jesus spoke to his disciples in the fourteenth chapter of the gospel of John. And again, I invite you to set in your mind your own idea of what that ridiculous castle Rick helping build might look like. (I'm sorry that I didn't take a photo of it.) And as you envision this beautiful house, consider Jesus' statement that in God's house there are many dwelling places. Please note that the literal translation from the Greek is not rooms but many dwelling places, many houses, many mansions. So I invite you to take the castle that I have been talking about and multiply it an infinite number of times. We end up with a pretty big place, a place with lots of room, room for you and for me, and even for a lot of people that you and I might never imagine taking up residence there. And, like Rick, God takes the stones, living stones, as they come. God doesn't cut them to size or trim them to shape or alter them in any way, but rather sets them into God's house in an order so that, in

the end each one fits just right, empowering each stone to be a strong part of the finished structure.

This past Tuesday as I gathered with members of the local Lectionary study group that I participate in, we found ourselves sharing the concept of empowerment as Jesus speaks of it in the fourteenth chapter of John, saying to his disciples that they but believe; believe that Jesus is in Father and the Father in him, even if they believe in nothing more than the reality of the powerful works that Jesus had done in their sight, that they too would be able do great works, even greater works than Jesus himself had done. Jesus was saying to his friends and to us as descendants of those men of faith, that we have the power to do amazing things, life transforming things, earth shaking, earth changing things if we but believe that God our Creator and Christ our Savior are one; if we believe even in power of works themselves. What a powerful message for a people in a world where we are constantly being bombarded with the assertion that we are not powerful, but powerless!

Just turn on the television. You will soon be told that you are not really beautiful unless you buy those products that will make you beautiful. You are that you are not really strong until you buy those products that will make your strong. You are not really confident unless you use a certain brand of underarm deodorant that will make you confident. People will turn away from you in disgust unless you wear our brand of clothing; you will not be truly connected with the world around you unless have our latest 7G artificial intelligence phone. You will not even be truly healthy unless you pile yourselves full of someone's pharmaceuticals! ("Ask your doctor whether "fratracine" ifs right for you!" Of course it's right for me! The man on TV just told me that it's right for me! He even named some of the symptoms that I have experienced at least at some time my life!") And the one that I still can't figure out: you are not fast enough until you buy our car; a car that can do one hundred seventy-eight miles per hour. Now what road in Connecticut am I supposed to be doing one hundred seventy-eight miles per hour on? What road anywhere would I want to drive at near the top speed of a formula one racer?

Friends, the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that I don't need to drive at one hundred seventy-eight miles per hour, and neither do you. The good news is that I don't need drugs for which I have no proven medical condition that requires treatment, nor do you. I have confidence in Christ and in my faith, my ability to believe, and that is enough. And while I realize that I need to care for myself and keep my body in good physical condition we have no need for all those things that people throughout the world spend hundreds of billions of dollars on each year in order to make themselves look more glamorous than they actually are, because you and I are children of God; magnificent works of the creator of heaven and earth, and that is good enough!

Listen again to the words of the author of the First letter of Peter; "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you might proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. And for all that you need no product advertised on television, or in magazines or in the newspaper. All you need is faith and belief in the one who

indeed calls you into the light. All you need is faith and belief in mighty acts of God that we proclaim. And then you need the will to live in that faith and to act on those beliefs.

So I say you, as I say also to myself, "Go out into the world and into your everyday lives and be that person, that magnificent person, that God created you to be. Open your eyes to the wonder of who you are, and help others to see themselves in the same way, so that we may indeed be built into that holy structure; so that we may find that house of many mansions, in which we have been invited to dwell and in fact to even be part of the very structure of; a home that is for us here and now, and to all eternity. Amen.