

Sunday May 10, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome (Greg W)

“Turn full your soul’s vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him... For He is worthy to have all there is to be had in the heart that He has died to win.” These are the words of Lilius Trotter, who was a missionary in Algeria for 38 years in the late 1800’s, but they are timeless in their application to Christian life. As we continue to live lives interrupted by the current coronavirus pandemic, it is important that we continue put the things of God first and foremost in our minds. How easy it becomes even for those of us who profess to be faithful followers of Christ to get caught up in the “things of earth,” so that our heavenly vision and values become blurred and dull

Welcome to the service today, and a special welcome to all the mothers this Mothers’ Day. In Leviticus 19 we read; “Every one of you shall revere his mother...” Therefore I hope that you will feel particularly adored today. As part of our service today Stephen will be interviewing a few people about their mums and how they are going to celebrate today with them (or without them!)

Well friends, whilst we continue to be physically separated due to social distancing requirements, we don’t need to give up meeting together. Our on line & printed copies of the service enable us to continue to come together as God’s Church to worship Him and to share together as His people. I trust that you are encouraged, as I am, to know that as we watch or read the service in our lounge room, kitchen, or wherever we are that other people who make up the body of believers in our church are doing the same.

Today in our bible reading and during the sermon we will look at the first half of 1 Peter 2. We’ll learn how our connection to Christ makes us Living Stones along with Christ, and that we have a God ordained role to play in building the church, with Christ as the foundation stone. Before we sing and make a joyful noise, let us pray.

Prayer (Greg W)

Father God, we gather together today as your people and give you thanks and praise that you are just and merciful. Thank you that you have made man in your image and given us dominion over the earth and all that is in it. We pray Lord that we would rule over the earth in a way that is pleasing to You, acknowledging that you made and are in control of all things. We pray for wisdom as we consider how to look after the world you have made, to be sustained by it as you intended, and to not cause it damage through our actions.

Heavenly Father, just as you make seed burst forth from the earth, cultivate in us a desire to spread the good news of the gospel; grow in us a spirit not of timidity but one of boldness and a firm desire to speak of your love and faithfulness towards your people. Thank you that your love has been shown through the death of Your son, Jesus Christ, on a cross of wood to pay the price for our sin. Thank you that through this sacrifice we have been forgiven of our sin, and continue to be forgiven of the sins we commit given our sinful nature. Thank you that You are a faithful God whose promises can be trusted. We therefore come to You confident that when we place our trust in Jesus your promise of being adopted as Your heirs and of being given eternal life can be relied upon. We pray Lord that we will strive to live the new life you have graciously given us, to bring glory to Your name. We pray that we will put off our old ways and continue to grow in godliness, seeking Your will for our lives.

We thank you Father that you sent your Holy Spirit to dwell in all believers. Thank you that through the

Holy Spirit we are sanctified and that we can be made to be the people you wish us to be. Today as we study your word about living stones in 1 Peter , we pray that we will have hearts willing to accept your will for our life. We pray that as Stephen speaks to us that you will empower him to speak boldly from your word.. We pray that we will be encouraged to make changes in our lives if that is what is required. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Song Behold our God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oywl4NTYtVE>

OR Song To God be the glory https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD_9P9DB4pw

Bible Reading – 1 Peter 2:4-10 (NIV)

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you 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. ⁶For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”, ⁸and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once 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.

Family Matters – Mother's Day Interviews with Liz, Rosemarie and Jenny

https://youtu.be/OfP_pdHzvwM

Kids Song God is Everywhere <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhRQHGjCgc0>

Pastoral Prayer (Tom B).

Lord, today we want to thank you for mothers and the unique role they fulfil in our society. We thank you for those who are mothers and grandmothers and for the way they have nurtured and cared for their children and grandchildren. There are many who have stepped into the role of being a mother for children who have needed it. For those women who have substituted as mother figures, we thank you too, Father. Help them to be a godly example to the children in their care.

Heavenly Father, we pray for those who cannot be with their mothers today, whether through distance, death, estrangement or even COVID-19 restrictions. Please comfort those who are grieving on this Mother's Day. We pray also for those mothers experiencing that separation, that they will be aware of your all-encompassing love. There are mothers who are raising children without the support of a father. We pray you will help them to be the best role model they can be for their children. And for those women who for various reasons have been unable to become mothers, we pray that they will know your love especially today.

Father, we bring before you those in missionary service. We pray for Paul and Carol Lukins, who are spending time caring for ageing parents. Help them to be able to do this without guilt and to manage their emotions as they are split between two continents. We pray that others are faithfully undertaking the work they have been doing with the Mursi people and, if you will that they return, Lord, that they will be

able to resume their ministry with renewed vigour. Additionally, for those missionaries who are separated from parents today, we ask that you will comfort both families and that many might be able to find ways to reconnect online.

Father in heaven, we want to praise you for the miraculous work going on in Saudi Arabia. Despite extreme oppression, you are growing your church in that country and people are coming to faith through many different means. We thank you for those missionaries who are showing such courage in sharing your Word in Saudi Arabia and pray for their safety. Lord, we also pray for those who have come to faith through other means, such as technology & visions you have provided. Help them to find solace & encouragement despite their environment and to be reassured of your love for them. And we ask that you will engender a mighty change in Saudi Arabia, such that Christianity might be able to flourish without the terrible persecution that is currently the norm.

Father, we continue to pray for the changes that have been wrought through the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Thank you that Australia has been reasonably successful in combating the disease thus far. Lord, we bring before you those who have lost loved ones, who are suffering with the virus now and those who have been made vulnerable through the changes to our day-to-day lives, whether due to susceptibility to the disease or because of being at risk at home. Please comfort and protect people in those situations and minimise their harm and distress. As restrictions are eased, Lord, we pray for wisdom from our community rather than complacency and that people will not take unnecessary risks until the pandemic had been overcome. Please help those who are testing for a vaccine in their search and we pray it might be affordable, available and easily administered. And Father, we pray especially for those nations who have gone through a much more challenging time than Australia, that they will soon see an end to this terrible virus and that the damage to people will be minimised.

You are Lord over all, Father, and we pray we will be mindful of Jesus, who you brought back to life after his crucifixion to show your power over sin, Satan and death. And it's through his name we bring these petitions to you. Amen

Song. Undivided https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DaoRBUSL_w

Sermon https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_v8ldDEUyY

Or <https://www.facebook.com/Charlestown-Presbyterian-Church-113127747005906>

I was born and raised in a time when middle names were incredibly boring. My middle name is John, my two brother's middle names are James and Charles. My sister's middle name is Catherine. All very English. All very staid. All quite boring. But today middle names are anything but boring. Flicking through potential middle names I came across Badger, Caspian, Danger, Maverick, Orion, Zeus, Rainbow, Blossom, Magenta, Taylor. I used to joke that I would love to call my daughter Taylor Taylor. It certainly would encourage her to get married and change her name wouldn't it?

But the ultimate boring middle name is The, don't you think? As in William the Conqueror. James the Just. Edward the Confessor. Robert the Red. Billy the Kid. Bob the Builder. Well today in 1 Peter we are being introduced to God's special building project. God has chosen strangers from all round the world, he is made them into his family and through them he is building a spiritual temple, a Church, a physical representation of God here on earth. It is really quite breathtaking what God is doing. And it involves three persons, each who have the middle name 'the'. God the builder. Jesus the cornerstone and Us the living stones.

1. God the Builder (verses 4-5)

⁴“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but **chosen by God and precious to him**—⁵ 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.”

God is not just the Creator. The Sustainer. The Judge. The Redeemer. The Saviour. He is also the builder. Not a builder, one of many builders. He is the builder. The one who is building a spiritual house. A temple. A place where spiritual sacrifices will be made.

In the OT God instructed Solomon to build a temple. A place where God and mankind would meet. A temple where the priests would offer up blood sacrifices, fellowship offerings, rites of purification in such a way that unholy people could actually come into the presence of God for their sins could be washed away. But that was just for the Jews. The people of God. Now people scattered all around modern day Turkey, who were strangers in a strange land, both Jews and Gentiles, were part of God’s most amazing building project ever. The Church.

God the Builder. Peter in ch 2 is taking us to a building site, he is giving us all hard hats & high visibility vests & he is showing us what God is building in his world. God hasn’t left the world to its own devices. He hasn’t wound up the clock & is letting it run down. At the very heart and centre of God’s plans for this world is the building that he is constructing. Not a dead temple but a living Church. A place where God himself will live & is currently living.

And this is an important concept to grasp. God does not dwell in Israel. On in Mecca. You don’t get a greater grasp of his presence at St Peter in the Vatican City or at a Buddhist Temple in Thailand or even in a worship service at the Presbyterian Church. The Church is where God lives. God the builder is building the people of God into a spiritual house where we have ready access to him 24/7.

So there is no need for the Temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. There is no need for massive Cathedrals that point others to God. There is actually no need for us to have a building at all to worship in. The Church is at the centre of what God is doing in this world. And the foundation that the Church is being built on is the living stone of Jesus Christ. Reject by humans. Scoffed at. Ridiculed. Crucified and Buried. But chosen by God and precious to Him.

So God’s first act as builder is to lay Christ as the cornerstone of his special building project. And this is so, so important for us to grasp today.

For if we want to build something for ourselves that will last and be valuable and precious in itself we can’t afford to have any other foundation to our building than Jesus Christ. So often we place work as the foundation of our lives or money or families or holidays as the cornerstone in our lives. And COVID-19 has blown many of these foundations away. They weren’t as secure as we thought they were.

So Peter is telling us in 1 Peter 2 that when God wants his building to be completely secure he places Jesus Christ as his chosen and precious stone. I would do well to meditate on that fact as you would also. For when the rain comes down and the floods come up if we haven’t built our lives on the rock of Jesus Christ, we in turn will be found at sea. Lost. Drowning. Without a foundation to live on. God the Builder leads us secondly to

2. Christ the Cornerstone (verses 6-8)

“For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen & precious cornerstone & the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

If God is building something that will last for all eternity, the most important stone of them all, Peter says, is the cornerstone. In the days before laser levels, rangefinders, CAD systems and other high-tech gadgetry, there were a simple way of getting your building built right. You dug your foundations and then you chose a cornerstone as your starting point. It was perfectly levelled and precisely aligned. And it became the basis for determining every measurement, uniformity and alignment.

So when God builds the basis of everything he is building upon Jesus Christ. Who is not a dead rock but a living stone! Not because he was at one time a living person. But because after the crucifixion was the resurrection. And the Church that was formed from that point on is based on the life, the death, the resurrection and the continuing living Lord of life. The Old Testament temple was made of stones quarried from the rock. But what God is building is better than that. It is based on the person and work of the living Lord Jesus.

And Peter says we can trust this cornerstone. He who trusts in Him will never be put to shame. He who relies on him will never see their building crumble. He who builds there life on the rock will never see what they have built washed away. For he is God's chosen foundation. He is precious in God's sight because he perfectly fits the bill. All other stones do not fit God's master plan. All other rocks would not be able to bear the weight of such a massive building project.

But to those who do not believe "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" ⁸ & "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for".

The rock if placed in the right spot is a perfect cornerstone, an ideal item to build your life upon. But if you don't put it in the right spot it will continually get in the way. It will be a stumbling block. And it will trip you up on the last day.

Now many of the Jews in Jesus time did exactly that. They rejected the stone that has become the capstone! They stumbled & missed out on joining in the amazing things that God was doing in their midst. Today is no different. So many Australians are blind to the ways of God & so they stumble over Jesus Christ. And it doesn't just lead them to a fall or a couple of bruises but the fall unfortunately takes them right down to the depth of hell.

Jesus must be the cornerstone of our lives or nothing at all. He must be the centre of all we do or he will cause us to fall or stumble. So that is why when God's special building project is being constructed God the builder places Christ the cornerstone as the foundation of all that he is doing then to that secure foundation he adds

3. Us the living stones. (verses 9-10)

⁴ *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ 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.*

God's temple, His special building project grows & develops and takes shape when He takes living stones like you and me. And connects them to Jesus and connects them to each other. So the first things we have to do is come to him, the living stone. Come to Jesus.

What does Peter mean by this? Does he mean come to the church building on a Sunday? Does he mean come to the front after the sermon and pray a prayer or sign a card? What does it mean to come to Jesus?

Peter says it means come to Jesus believing, come to Jesus by faith. But not just once. The verb in the original Greek means keep coming. Keep coming to Jesus. Every time you come to Jesus there is something more to gain. Something more to learn. Something more to trust in. Something more to build your life upon.

You never can drink the well of His grace and glory dry. You never can ask more of Him than He can give. You never can hurt more than He can heal. You never can sin more than He can redeem. You don't outgrow Jesus. You don't move past Jesus. The Christian life is one of continually coming to Him, resting on Him, rejoicing in Him. Come to Jesus, come together.

You are not just a rock lying around on a field or a brick hanging around a building site. It is not all about you! Collectively we are part of God's great building project. We are to come to Jesus yes, for sure. But we need to come together. We are stronger together. We are being built together. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. We need each other. And God will grow his church when your living stone is joined to my living stone and both of us rely upon the cornerstone, the living stone of Jesus Christ.

There's a story about a king of Sparta in ancient Greece who boasted to a visiting king about the mighty walls of Sparta. But the guest looked around and didn't see any walls. So he said, "I'd like to see those walls. Show them to me!" The Spartan ruler pointed with great pride to his well-trained troops, part of Sparta's mighty army, and exclaimed, "There they are! Those are the walls of Sparta!" Now just as each Spartan soldier was viewed by the king as a brick in his mighty wall, so we are viewed by God as "living stones... built up a spiritual house"

One spiritual house. Not many spiritual house. One Church. Not many Churches. One body of believers. Not many denominations. There is a unity of God's people that is bigger than just our Church. No we belong to the world wide Church. The Church of Jesus Christ.

Today the Church is scattered throughout the world and many of us can't even be in the same room as each other because of social distancing. A couple of months ago we had three places and times where our Church met but today we have over a hundred places and times where our Church meets. Now that's some form of Church growth isn't it?

But the reality is there are hundreds of millions of places where God's Church is meeting this morning. All over the world. But we are still one. We are one but we are many as the song goes. And God is the builder who is taking each living stone so that collectively he is the building a spiritual house. His spiritual and our spiritual home.

And we are a part of that because God chose us. In the same way he chose Jesus to be the cornerstone, he choose us not because we are a choice people or people that he desperately needed for his building project but he chose us because he loves us. Our value is not based on who we are but on the fact that we have been saved from our old way of life by the precious blood of Jesus. Look with me just how special we are.

⁹ *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession..."*

Wow! Each of these titles that were originally given to the people of Israel are now given to Peter's readers who are scattered around the back blocks of modern day Turkey. And as we read this letter they are also given to us.

A chosen people, God's says. You belong to me. You can't say I am a no body. That I don't fit anywhere. No you belong to me. You fit perfectly into God's purposes. For you are a royal priesthood. God's chosen people are kings and queens, they have royal blood pulsing through their veins for in their ancestry they have the king of kings and the Lord of Lords.

God's chosen people are priests they are for their job is now to offer spiritual sacrifices in the same way that the ancient priests used to bring sacrifices into the very presence of God. But there is no need to bring sin offerings to God because our high priest Jesus brought the perfect blood sacrifice once and for all to his father God when he himself died on the cross. But we can still bring fellowship offerings and thanksgiving offerings and peace offerings into God's presence. And the rest of the NT picks up on this theme and so

Romans 12:1 says we offer the sacrifice of our bodies as our spiritual act of worship.

Hebrews 13:15 says we continually offer the sacrifice of praise for when we confess the name of Jesus it is something that greatly pleases our God.

Revelation 8:4 says we offer the sacrifice of our prayers for the prayers of the saints are like the incense in the temple something that is a sweet smell in the nostrils of God.

Hebrews 13:16 says we offer the sacrifice of good works for our worship is not just with our voices it has to be with our whole being.

Philippians 4:18 says we offer the sacrifice of our money as money can be used to help grow the work of God in our world and help grow the kingdom

And Romans 15:16 says we offer the sacrifice of bringing people to Christ so that through our weak and feeble words there can be more praise given to God, more good works done in God's name, more prayers offered as God's building continues to grow.

⁹ *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."* We now have found a place to belong. We are not just Australians, we are Christians. We are part of the greatest nation on earth. The Christian nation that has more members than any other nation and whose heritage stretches back to the beginning of time and will last until the end of time.

And lastly we are God's special possession. He has us in our hands. He will never let us go. So all the blessing that were promised to God's people in the OT find their fulfilment in us, in the Church because of the work of Jesus Christ.

So is the Church perfect? No. But does God have a plan to purify her? Yes. Does God have another plan by which to make his glory in Jesus known to his world? No. We are it. There is no plan B. Those who have been given these tremendous privileges have the responsibility to *"declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*¹⁰ *(For) 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".*

So we need to get going. We need to be wholly committed to God's special building project. We need respond with praise, delight & joy. Because of what he is has done for us, what he is doing in us & what he promised to do for us. We no longer stumble around wondering what our task in life is all about. It is to be a part of God's building project. It is build our life on the rock of Jesus. It is to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise, prayer, worship, good works & to be involved in the work of evangelism so that others will also be involved in these tasks of praise, prayer and good works. We are to play our part helping God to build his church.

A number of years ago at a Sunday School the teacher, asked her class to build the church with their hands. "Put your hands together now, here is the church, here is the steeple" she began. And suddenly, she was

aware that she had done something really embarrassing. For one of her children only had one hand. And he was looking awkwardly at her wondering what to do. The teacher paused not knowing what to say when the little girl seated next to the boy with one hand held hers up and said, "Here, let's build the church together."

Friends our task is to build the church together. With the blueprint that God the builder has given us. With Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. And so together as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, let us declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Song Cornerstone https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3HH_-1Zbs

Or My hope is built <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWdNgXsd46Y>

Benediction.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. " (NIV)