

## What do *Living Stones* Look Like?

### 1 Peter 2:2-10

I am intrigued by the kaleidoscope of metaphors for the people of the Church in 1 Peter. They – we – are *living stones*, built together into a *living temple*, a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation*, people who were once *no people* who have somehow become *God's people*, people who *knew no mercy* who have now *received mercy*.

At the same time I was reflecting on all those metaphors for God's people, the Church, I kept walking by a display put up by Mother Kathleen on the bulletin board of an online exhibition from the Episcopal Church and the Visual Arts. It presents a kind of patchwork quilt, an exhibition by many artists sharing their perspective on *Proclaiming by Word and Example the Good News of God in Christ*. 40 pictures are pieced together in this quilt.

(1) In one we see a symbolic rendering of today's lesson from Acts of the Apostles. Stephen's cloak is collapsing in a storm of rocks while above it a dove descends and flames of the Holy Spirit ascend. Other saints are pictured: (2) Perpetua and her companions who though savaged by wild beasts would not renounce their faith in Christ, John the Baptist, a desert mother. (3) An icon portraying the prophet Amos has him holding a scroll proclaiming "*let justice roll down like waters.*" (4) A picture of one person embracing another has a quotation from Thomas Aquinas above it, "*I would rather feel compassion than know the meaning of it.*" (5) A collage showing a man in ragged clothes and a beat-up-hat with wings pasted on him. Superimposed on his t-shirt are the words from James, "*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for thereby some have entertained Angels unawares.*" (look up this exhibit yourselves at ECVA.org)

That patch work quilt of images of proclaiming God's love is something like the symbolic and mystical meaning of Peter saying that we are *living stones built into a living temple*. The curator of the exhibit invites us to see ourselves "*as works of art – to take off our shoes and step in. To look, learn, love and when we leave, to leave with hearts that seek to proclaim, as does this exhibition by **word and example** the good news of God in Christ... Allow the art to look upon you and move your heart. Become the art. Become the proclamation by **word and example** of the good news of God in Christ.*" (The Rev. Mark Bozzuti-Jones, Curator and Priest for Pastoral Care, Trinity Church, Wall Street).

We may look like ordinary people but we are in fact *living stones* built together into Christ's Church. We don't look like we're related but we are actually a *holy nation*. Only a few of us dress in long white albs or wear our collars backwards but all of us are a *royal priesthood*. There's a lot more about us than meets the eye. We may not feel special or even feel loved or appreciated but we are *God's own beloved people*.

The mystery begins for us in Baptism. Today (at 10:15 a.m.) we will welcome through Holy Baptism Abigail Reiley Anne Morano and Katelyn Megan Nugent as new members of that mystical body of believers, new living stones in that living temple. Not only will we baptize Abigail and Katelyn we will also renew our Baptismal Covenants. This is the Covenant by which we are built as *living stones* into that living temple. The mortar linking us as living stones is both our *belief* as we express it in the Apostles Creed and

also our promises to act. There are 5 questions and 6 promises in that Covenant. We promise that we will:

- *Continue* in Christian community, keeping the Apostles teaching, staying in fellowship, sharing in the life of Holy Communion and in prayer.
- *Persevere* in resisting evil and when we fall anyways to *repent*, ask forgiveness and return to God.
- *Proclaim*, as the art exhibit illustrates, by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.
- *Seek and serve* Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.
- *Strive* for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of each and every human being.
- The sixth promise is repeated 5 times. We promise to ask for *help!* “*I will with God’s help.*” Each of those promises is completely impossible on our own and so the promise to seek God’s help is crucial to even beginning to get to square one with any of the others.

In our baptisms we are reminded that God claims us as his own without our having had to do anything to earn or deserve it. We are loved. We are adopted as God’s own children, his own people. Our sins are washed clean. We are empowered with God’s Holy Spirit. And in the Baptismal Covenant we are invited to claim that high calling of being a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, his living stones by seeking his help to live in the ways he calls us to live.

In hymn 51, the hymn we will sing at the offertory, we are reminded that,  
*We the Lord’s people, heart and voice uniting  
praise him who called us out of sin and darkness  
into his own light  
that he might anoint us a royal priesthood.*

*This is the Lord’s house, home of all his people,  
school for the faithful, refuge for the sinner,  
rest for the pilgrim, haven for the weary;  
all find a welcome.*

Can we learn to see ourselves as something more than church members? Can we picture ourselves as a royal priesthood? Can we picture one another as God’s people? Can we remember that we ourselves once knew no mercy and now know God’s merciful love and forgiveness? Can we welcome all as we ourselves have been welcomed in Christ’s love? Can we remember that each and every person here is beloved of God and treat them as such? Can we be about the business of *proclaiming by word and example the love of God in Christ?* Can we *seek and serve* Christ in the needs of those who are near and those who are far away? Can we work towards justice and peace?

We can see and be the great mystery that is the Church of Christ as we offer our lives again and again in his service. We claim this mystery for ourselves and are built as living stones into that living temple as we promise: *I will with God’s help.* Amen.

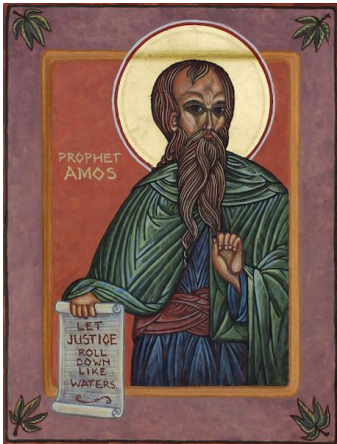
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