

“A Living Stone”

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 1Peter 2:2-10

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Every religion has its virtue like kindness, mercy, love and hope. When the September 11 attacks happened in 2001, I didn't understand the psyche of the Islamic terrorist group-al Qaeda. I question what their foundational belief was in their violent acts. Why did they want to kill 3,000 innocent lives in their name of God? I assume that every religion has dignity for the human life. Recently, the news that an extreme Islamic terrorist group- Boko Haram in Nigeria kidnapped nearly 300 school girls sadly broke our hearts again. Surely, these radical terrorist groups wouldn't represent the Islamic faith. They used the name of God to accomplish their purpose. We only see the evil spirit of hatred in their violent attacks instead of respect for human lives. No matter what we believe in, the spirit of hatred, retaliation, and violence cannot be primary foundations in our faith. If I compare these radical terrorist groups to a building, they are like buildings without any foundation. It will collapse like a sand castle any moment.

Jesus Christ is our solid foundation in Christian faith. Christians are followers of Christ and the church is a community that is called to be like Christ through our acts. Our Scripture readings describe Jesus Christ as our rock of refuge, a cornerstone in a house and a living stone. What does it mean that Jesus is 'a living stone'? Why 'a living stone' among other fancy materials? This morning, I hope we learn more about our Christian foundation. Let's imagine we are building a house. Stones are used to make a strong foundation.

There is an old tale about a wise woman who was traveling in the mountains. She found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry. The wise woman opened her bag to share her food and the hungry traveler saw the precious stone. He asked the woman to give it to him. Without hesitation, she handed him the stone. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone's worth, and he knew it would give him security for a lifetime. But, a few days later he went back in search of the old wise woman and returned the stone to her. "I've been thinking," he said. "I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone."

Our Christian faith is based on God's unconditional love for us. The Bible tells us that Jesus became 'a living stone' to give away his life for our salvation. No matter what we have done wrong against God, God chose to love us rather than punish us. This is what we found in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus forgave his disciples when they ran away at his last moment. God forgives our sins and selfishness and accepts us even though we still turn away from God to have our own way. Giving away is not our virtue, but our God's. This old woman in our story describes our God's heart and acts in Jesus Christ. The essence of our Christian faith is love that has the spirit of compassion towards others. This is our foundation. Our New Testament reading calls this as 'a living stone.' An early Christian father, Augustine challenges us with this question, "What does love look like?" He explains it this way. "It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has the eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men and women. That is what love looks like." As you came to worship and look around the Narthex area, you are reminded of our stone's foundation; for instance, the Heifer International table, a brand new outreach ministry banner, etc. Soon we'll have another reminder to build our foundations from Mary McCollum's suggestion that as we enter to worship, we will read over the door, "Enter to Worship" and as we leave, "Depart to Service."

Our New Testament reading is a part of a letter written for new Christian brothers and sisters in Asia Minor. This letter encouraged new Christians to live like Christ and to resist any temptation to retaliate on those who oppose them. The letter also reminded them that they become living stones. What is it to become living stones in our world? We are called to love others in the name of Jesus. We do this as individuals by being fully present to the hurting, the oppressed and the marginalized. As the church, we must proclaim as a community that God truly dwells within the stones. The spirit of love helps us to serve and makes us become living stones. We are all different shapes and sizes but we build one community sharing our God's love. Truly, in God's love, there won't be any distinction as children of God. All must be welcome in this place. We at Fair Oaks church are called to become living stones for the kingdom of God. Amen.