



BILL GILBREATH: BUILT ROCK-SOLID!

Grace/Caminando con Jesús Lutheran Church

Bill Gilbreath Funeral

April 25, 2015

Pastor David J Salinas

SERMON TEXT

1 Peter 2:4-6

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. 6 For 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.”**

✠ IN NOMINE JESU ✠

Oh, you know the story: Once upon a time there were three little pigs. One pig built a house of straw; the second pig built his house with sticks. They built their houses very quickly, and then sang and danced all day because they were lazy. The third little pig worked hard all day and, he built his house *with bricks*.

A big bad wolf saw the two little pigs while they danced and played and thought, “What juicy tender meals they will make!” He chased the two pigs and they ran and hid in their houses. The big bad wolf went to the first house, the straw house, and he huffed and puffed and blew the house down in no time flat. The frightened little pig ran to the second pig’s house made of sticks. The big bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew the stick house down in hardly any time at all. Now, the two little pigs were terrified and ran to the third pig’s house that was made of bricks.

The big bad wolf tried to huff and puff and blow the house down, but he could not. He kept trying for hours but the house was very strong and the little pigs were safe inside.

Being a relative new-comer to Grace, I was not privileged to know Bill Gilbreath before he suffered his stroke in July of 2012, but when I paid my first visit to the Gilbreath home, one of the first things Maxine proudly said as she pointed to their fire place was—"Bill did all the brick work you see here!" I was impressed. I look forward to getting to know Bill better in heaven, but if there's one thing I know about Bill Marion Gilbreath—and you all know this too—it's this: he was a faithful, hard-working man and he loved building with brick. So, as I was thinking about the consolation and comfort I'm blessed to share with and leave with you all today, this thought, above all others, rose to the surface—Ah, **Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid!**

I. Bill was built on Christ, the Cornerstone!

I say that not really because Bill did fine brick work that stands and will stand the test of time—though that is most certainly true. (We'll get a chance to see that later today at the Gilbreath home). And I say *Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid* not because Bill was a strapping, well-built, hunk of a man—though that too was undeniably true. (Take a look at some of the pictures of Bill in his heyday, and you may have many questions for Maxine about him, but one question you will not ask her is, 'Girl, what did you ever see in him?' Uh-uh, Bill Gilbreath was 'whistle'). But, no, no, no, I say *Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid* because he was one of the living stones Peter talked about who was built on the living Stone, the Cornerstone, the Rock of our salvation—Christ Jesus, the risen Lord! Bill Gilbreath placed his heart, his soul, his trust on Christ, the solid Cornerstone of the church!

Good thing, too, because one of the truths that we see in the story of *The 3 Little Pigs*, and in Peter's words before us here is this: in this life there is and always will be fierce and relentless forces huffing and puffing and trying to blow down the building, the holy sanctuary in which the triune God resides, that is the holy Christian church—the sum total of all believers in Jesus! Peter wrote this letter in large part to encourage Christians who, as he put it, were “suffering grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Pe 1:6). One of those kinds of trials was the wolf, Satan, hunting and hounding, huffing and puffing, trying to blow down their house of faith through open persecution. But “all kinds of trials” speaks to many other winds and forces beside persecution that beat against and stressed trust in Jesus—things like setbacks, hurts, illnesses, worries, dying. Perhaps, the fiercest kind of trial and stress on their faith came not from the huffing and puffing on the outside, the huffing and puffing of Satan and the struggles of life but from the huffing and puffing on the inside, from their naturally sinful hearts that produced tornados of doubts, as they suffered “all kinds of trials.”—Why does he allow you to go through so much? Why this? Why you? Why now?

Our dear Bill, of course, faced the same fierce and relentless forces; his Christian faith felt the stress of the same huffing and puffing against it, as the believers whom Peter originally addressed. As every other Christian living to the present, Bill's Christian faith and values, were under attack by the Satan-led persecution of an anti-Christian society. Who knows, but, maybe his efforts to get his teenage kids to church every Sunday was met by some resistance.—I was a teenager too, and didn't always appreciate hearing my mom tell me to get up for church. While the Lord blessed Bill with the health to not miss a day of work in his life, he was not immune to illness and debilitation, as we all know. And after being so active and healthy all of his life, and then having the use of his once-strong body severely impaired,

how could there not have been, at times, frustrations and doubts huffing and puffing, as he could only sit back and watch his wife and children for whom he worked so hard all his life work so hard to take care of him—Why this? Why now? Why me?

So, as Peter began his letter, I say—Praise God! Praise God that Bill Marion Gilbreath was built rock-solid by being built on Christ Jesus, the Cornerstone! Praise God that in his eternal and unearned love for all, for Bill, God chose to make his only Son the Cornerstone! Praise God that he took up the work of stone mason, chiseling out and placing his only Son as the Cornerstone by lifting him up on a cross, and then huffing and puffing and blowing him down with his justice for the sins of the whole world of which Bill was a part, and then by raising Christ from the stone tomb, and setting him at his right hand! Praise God that Jesus, the living Stone, the risen and ascended Stone, took up the work of stone mason also, chiseling out and placing Bill Gilbreath as a living stone and setting him perfectly in place in his temple. Jesus did this for Bill by seeing to it that Bill heard the great good news—Bill, I died for the world! You are part of the world! Therefore, I died for you! I have forgiven you! You are mine, mine, all mine!” The Lord Jesus made Bill Gilbreath a beautiful and rock-solid living stone by seeing to it that he was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that he continued hearing the good news of Christ-crucified and risen and receiving that great good news in the Supper of Christ’s true body and blood! Praise God that Bill Gilbreath was *built on Christ, the Cornerstone*, because that meant that no matter how hard the forces of evil, including sin, Satan, and stroke, huffed and puffed, trying to blow down the house of Bill’s well-founded faith in Jesus, that house would not and did not fall! The chosen and precious cornerstone held his living stone firmly in place against all the forces pounding against it. In fact, I am so grateful that the Lord did that for him in

part through undeserving me. Knowing that he would be calling his dear servant and living stone to his side, knowing that Bill and his family would face the fierce, huffing and puffing of death, Christ used even me as a blocklayer's trowel to reinforce his faith and that of his loved ones in preparation for the storm. I was given the grace, the joy to visit Bill the day before he died and proclaim to him the great good news that Christ is risen, he is risen, indeed, and what that meant for him—forgiveness, peace, hope, everlasting life—and I got to feed him the body and blood of the risen Savior that fortifies faith in that Savior that nothing can blow down! With that rock-solid faith in place, at 1:30 pm on Friday, April 17, the Lord Jesus picked up his hard-working stone mason and living stone and carried him to the home he built for him with the wood and nails of the cross!

Oh, rejoice and praise God that Bill Gilbreath was built rock-solid by being built on Christ, the cornerstone! Rejoice and praise God for that, because no one who builds on *that* stone will ever be put to shame! And so, everything that we just said of Bill is no less true of you and me! We too face the same fierce forces, the same hard huffing and puffing of Satan, sin, and struggle in life! We too will and do face opposition for our faith! We too will and do have our hurts, our ills, our dying, our moments of doubt. But, as was true of Bill, Christ is our cornerstone too, and he has come to us to ensure that we are and remain his living stones in the beautiful temple that is his church. In fact, Jesus uses the occasion of Bill's death to ensure that very thing! Today, Jesus tells you and me, "As I love my living stone, Bill, so do I love you! What I have done for my dear Bill, I have done and continue to do for you, yes, yes, for you! I died for you! I rose and live for you! You are my beautiful, holy, living stone! Lean on me, lay on me in life and in death, and one day I promise you, I will pick you up in my arms and carry you

across the threshold of the beautiful home I prepared for you with the wood and nails of my cross!

2. Bill built others on Christ, the Cornerstone!

Of all the fine memories you have of Bill Gilbreath, please remember this one: **Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid!**

Remember he was that because he was built on Christ, the cornerstone. And you know what? Because he was built on Christ, we can say, *Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid* also in this sense and for this reason: he helped build others on Christ, the Cornerstone!

There's something beautiful and important about the adjective "living," that Peter chose to describe the stones, like Bill, that were built on the chosen and precious cornerstone that is Christ. The word translated in English "living," 'zontos' in the original Greek, does not just mean alive but *active* and *productive*.

Is that not just a perfect way to describe Bill Gilbreath? Until he suffered his stroke, Bill was an active, productive, hard-working man, as we've said. But more than that, by being founded and built on the zontos Stone, the living Stone, who was active and productive in redeeming and saving him, Bill had a *zontos* faith, an active and productive faith in Christ, the Cornerstone. That living and active trust of Bill's showed itself in many ways, but, perhaps, above all, was this—his commitment and work to see to it that others were like him, built on Christ, the Cornerstone! Bill not only built a rock-solid fire-place in the Gilbreath home; he helped build a rock-solid faith in his family by ensuring they were in church and that his children received a Christian education at Grace School and ELHS. He helped build a rock-solid faith in many other children, including those honoring the Lord for him today. Bill was a big supporter of Grace Lutheran School!

All of that gives us even more reason to praise Jesus, the Cornerstone for Bill! His active and productive faith in Jesus, which helped build faith in Jesus in others is yet more evidence for us who grieve that Bill was, in fact, a living stone founded on the living Stone, and, is alive with him in the many-roomed mansion of heaven. And, it is in part through that active and productive faith of Bill Gilbreath that we too are living stones who will be in heaven with him! You see, in part through Bill's faithful support of Grace Lutheran Church and School by his prayers and offerings, we too have heard the good news of Jesus that makes us living stones of the holy temple of God!

The world is drawn to and loves flashily; it loves glitz and glamor; it loves bling; that was not Bill Gilbreath. Flip to the front cover of the bulletin. What do you see? Just a plain, simple cross. There's a good reason for that. Bill was a plain, simple, humble man with a simple, humble but solid faith in his Savior. But that is our great comfort and consolation this day and in the days ahead! ***Bill Gilbreath: Built Rock-Solid! He was built on Christ, the Cornerstone! He built others on that same Cornerstone!*** May you remember and cherish that about Bill! May you rejoice that with him you are part of that amazing spiritual house that rises up and stands forever in Christ to his eternal glory! And, together with Bill, may we all get to see and marvel at the beautiful brick-work that Jesus has done with us all! Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

