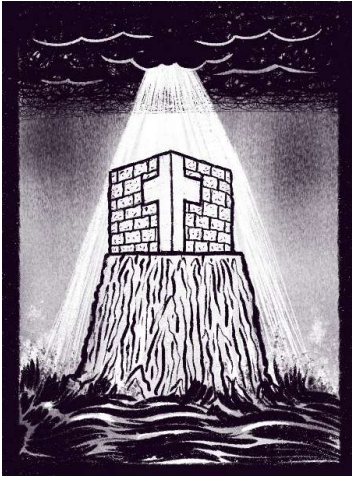


Living Stones

6th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity

1 Peter 2:2 – 10



2Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

8and

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Men in white suits worked day and night. With concentrated expressions, they bent over small stones and seemed to want to clean them with small brooms. Repeatedly, the cry rang out: "We must hurry. No more time!" Every now and then an excited cheer rang out. The great spectacle took place on the banks of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. Due to the drought in northern Iraq, archaeologists had discovered a 3,400-year-old palace, as well as a large number of cuneiform inscriptions from this very ancient time. Such a find is of great importance to researchers, for the ancient stones and remains are like bright spotlights that can tell us how the people of that time lived. But the archaeologists only had a small window of opportunity, for the rainy season would soon shroud everything in darkness again and perhaps conceal the secrets of the ancient palace forever.

Our sermon text today is also about stones. These stones, too, cast light and reveal something. However, they are not dead stones; they are living stones and are incorporated into a living structure where they can shine brightly. This bright light does not come from the distant past, but is directly connected to Christ, who sits at the right hand of the Father. The stones incorporated into Christ are like spotlights from heaven, shining out into the whole world. When Peter's letter speaks of living stones, one can safely assume that he also knows something about the opposite, that is, dead stones. Peter certainly was familiar with such dead stones. There was, for example, the great temple in Jerusalem. Peter and Jesus' disciples had marveled at this temple. He and his simple fisherman friends had never seen anything so large before. One stone alone in the foundation of the temple was about the size of a modern double-decker bus. What splendor it was in the city of God Jerusalem! While they were still admiring it, Jesus suddenly calmed the excitement: "Not one stone shall be left upon another, and everything shall be destroyed." Jesus' words were shocking. Hardly any of the disciples could understand these words. Later, Jesus spoke again about this temple. The more he spoke, the more the disciples were completely baffled by their significance. Once, there was almost a major riot because Jesus had called for the temple be torn down and He would rebuild it in three days. Yes, those were the days! But many years had passed since then. Peter wanted to write a letter to the churches and was thinking about everything that had happened. And he had to realize again that he, along with the other disciples, had completely misunderstood Jesus. Even in the last hours before his death, Peter tried to defend Jesus with all his might. An ice-cold shiver still ran down his spine when he thought of the hour when he himself had denied Jesus. By now, he was an old man and had experienced much. Given his age and the extremely perilous situation the entire Church faced, there was little hope for a happy, long life.

Peter's life, like the stones on the banks of the Tigris, would soon disappear beneath a deep layer of water. Perhaps the entire Church, which was then suffering bitter persecution, would also disappear. Are we all dead stones, vanishing into nothingness? Peter was firmly convinced that life does not depend on external circumstances, but on Jesus himself! Jesus himself testified to this. Therefore, by writing these words, he wanted to encourage us and the churches of that time: Stand firm in Jesus Christ! In Jesus, we Christians are joined together in a building that far transcends our time and our culture.

This building will outlive all powers and all ages. Yes, in Jesus, we are even connected to the heavenly hosts and are one with them. No heights or depths could ever take away this connection! But how could he possibly explain all this to people in such a hopeless situation? He himself had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. He himself had also witnessed that the deepest despair can be transformed into joy. He experienced this when Jesus accepted him again after his denial and entrusted him with the ministry of shepherding His people. But how could he possibly explain all this to people who hadn't witnessed it? Devoutly, his old hands stroked the stone slab on which he had laid his parchment. Over many generations, this stone slab had become as smooth and supple as velvet. He stroked his hand in circular motions over this stone slab. The stone had surely outlived many generations and would soon outlive his own worn hand as well. Then these simple words came to him: It's all about life! That's precisely why Jesus came into the world! He wanted to save us from death! He wanted to make us living stones. And he said this time and again and testified to it with his deeds! Therefore, the only thing that should matter to us Christians is to remain firmly connected to Jesus and thus remain living. "Long for the pure spiritual milk," flows from Peter's pen. When we read Jesus' words, we abide in Him and will live. Abide in the living stone, Jesus! Peter knew the human heart all too well. He knew how easy it was to stray from the path and follow the wrong path. He remembered the days in Jerusalem. With horror, he thought of how they had mocked, ridiculed, and finally crucified Jesus. As Jesus hung there on the cross, there wasn't a spark of hope left in Peter or the other disciples. The living Jesus was broken and torn. There was no life left in Him. Everyone could clearly see that. It was over for Jesus, and it was over for faith! And yet things turned out differently. God Himself intervened in human history. God Himself changed the rules of nature and had the stone rolled away from where Jesus' dead body lay. Out came the living Jesus. And with him the living hope and strength to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel. God made the stone the builders had rejected the cornerstone. He thought about all this, and then everything became crystal clear to him again. God himself raised Jesus from the dead. Just as God himself founded the Church. Therefore, there is absolutely no power in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that could tear down this living building. Peter stroked his old hand over the stone slab and then enthusiastically continued scribbling on his parchment. We have just read the words he painstakingly wrote down back then, and they have touched our hearts. Stones can talk. We already know that from archaeologists. But we also know that from St. Peter. But are there such things as dead stones? As a child, I remember that we students would draw a brick on our school bags in protest against our teachers. This brick was a subtle reference to the song "Another Brick in the Wall" by the pop group Pink Floyd. In the very conservative South Africa of the time, it was of course completely forbidden to play this song or even talk about it because the song sang about how teachers indoctrinated students and refused to give them any freedom. The result of such an education, according to Pink Floyd, was a dead stone that could never become anything. "Another Brick in the Wall." How relevant these words of the pop group are even today. Many people feel like such a meaningless brick in a wall, unknown and unnoticed. In the history of humanity, it can be that a single individual has no significance at all in the flow of history. We came into this world with nothing, and we will leave this world with nothing. Jesus wants it differently. Through your baptism, He called you by name. He knows you. He wants nothing more than for you to live. He wants nothing more than for you to be there, alive in Him, remaining in Him. Amen.