

Building on the Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:2-10

Now that the snow has hopefully gone for good, we've entered construction season. Roadwork on Stange, Grand, and Duff cause backups and slowdowns to get almost anywhere. The construction along US 30 on the way to Nevada will mess things up for a while in the short term, though it will hopefully make things better in the long term.

Roads aren't the only thing under construction. For the past year, the area around the church has been full of construction noise. The sorority house next door was torn down, and then they dug deep down to put rock and other foundation materials. After the hail storms in the past couple of months, neighborhoods are full of houses getting new roofs.

It may not be a foundation, but the same principle applies. If you don't get the first shingle right, it will affect how the rest of that row of shingles is, and how the finished roof works. If the first shingle is off, it affects everything else.

That's what a cornerstone does, too. It's not just something that supports a structure. It's what is used to make sure everything that is built off of it. That's why God wants to build up his Church on a foundation of prophets and apostles with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone, and to make us into living stones that he can use.

Throughout the Old Testament, God reminds His people that He is the builder, the one who laid the foundation. When Job questions why all that had happened to him had happened, God responds by asking, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). In Isaiah, God tells his people that "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation"

(Isaiah 28:16). In the New Testament, this is applied directly to Jesus by the apostle Paul, as he wrote "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11) and "Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 3:21). And as Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount with the parable of the house built on the rock, He showed that He is our rock and firm foundation.

In the excerpt from his first letter this morning, Peter talks about being built into a spiritual house, with Christ as the cornerstone. Writing to a diverse group of first century Christians, containing people from different cultures, different classes, different ways of life, Peter reminds them that they are being built together into a spiritual house. Stones that the world would reject are called to be living stones to be built up into a spiritual house. Those who were not a people are now God's people. Those who had not received mercy have now received mercy. That was a strange idea in Peter's day, and not everyone was ready for it.

The book and film Moneyball describes the process of Oakland A's GM Billy Beane trying to find a new way to build a baseball team based on analytics and data and sabermetrics, looking for players other teams rejected to make a team that was greater than its whole. The A's were forced to do this because they only had a third of the payroll that the Yankees had, and so they had to look for new ways of doing things. Following the Moneyball principles helped them get into the playoffs in 2002 and 2003 over teams with much higher payrolls. Analytics have now taken over sports at all levels, and the transfer portal and the NFL draft have been full of teams trying to build a

championship contender by hoping that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts, and that they have one key piece, one cornerstone, to build around.

That's what Jesus does as he builds us into a spiritual house. He calls those who would be rejected by the world. He calls together a group of disciples that no one would ever think of using, but uses them to change the world. He takes fishermen and makes them fishers of men. He takes a tax collector and uses his education to make him write one of the Gospels. He takes a group of followers that couldn't stay with him in the face of persecution and uses them to build the church through the persecutions they'd later endure.

Throughout the letter, Peter reminds the people that he's writing to that they are a unique people because of their identity as Christians. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). Or, as the King James Version translated it, "You are a peculiar people." Peter emphasized their distinctiveness, their differences from the world, to remind them that they are set apart. And that fact, the fact that they are set apart for God, that they will do things that others think of as "weird" or strange. They will live out lives of Christian service, caring for those that society deemed unworthy of concern. That's how the spiritual house would be built – with those that the world rejects.

Foundations are important. Today we celebrate Confirmation Sunday, as six 8th graders are recognized for the time and effort they've spent building their faith on the foundation received in their baptisms. They even built the model of the temple that's out in the narthex. But Confirmation isn't the final stage, either. It's not completion. It's a step on a lifelong journey of learning and growing and building.

One of the last things the 8th graders did as part of their confirmation preparations was to paint the bricks in the youth room. It places them among the youth who have gone before them. It also reminds us of those who made these same promises. Some have kept them, some haven't, and some we don't know about. We pray that the foundation they received here will stay with them, and God will continue to use them wherever they go, and will bring them back whenever they wander.

It's also the last weekend that college students are with us. ISU goes into finals week, and the final exams build on everything that has been learned over the semester. It, too, isn't the end. Students will still have to use what they've learned as they go on internship and co-ops, or graduate and move into the "real world." They saw how the foundations that they built on from before college gave them the ways to thrive here. Now they'll see how the foundations they had here will give them something to build off of as they move on to the next stage of their lives.

As living stones, as the people of God, we build up not only ourselves, but also those around us. We build up those within our community, through prayer, through helping others. We are one in the house of God.

Jesus continues to build us into a spiritual house. He continues to build us up out of people that the world might reject, those who are peculiar or strange or weird. But out of a diverse group of people, with Christ as our cornerstone, we're built into a spiritual house where Jesus will live forever.

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