The Church: *Living Stones and a Holy Priesthood*

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4-10
July 19, 2026 - Week 3 of Sermon Series: "Being the Church"

Key Sentence: *The church is strongest when every member knows: I am a living stone in God's house, and God has a place and purpose for me.*

Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we continue our July sermon series, "Being the Church." In the first week, we heard from Ephesians 2 that the church is God's household in Christ. In Christ, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but members of God's household. Christ is our cornerstone, and the Holy Spirit is building us together.

Last week, we heard from Acts 2 that the church is a community of worship and fellowship. The early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. They shared life together, cared for one another, and became a visible witness of God's grace.

Today, we come to 1 Peter 2:4-10, and Scripture gives us another beautiful description of the church. Peter says that Christ is the Living Stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight. Then Peter says that we also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.

This means the church is not made of passive spectators. The church is not an audience watching a few people do ministry. The church is not only the pastor's ministry. The church is the ministry of the whole people of God.

Every member matters. Every gift matters. Every prayer, every visit, every meal, every song, every committee, every act of service, and every word of encouragement becomes part of God's spiritual house.

This is especially important for us in a shared pastor ministry. A shared ministry cannot be built by one pastor alone. The pastor preaches, leads, guides, visits, and equips, but the whole congregation participates in Christ's ministry. CPC Plainview and CPC Rochester are not two churches waiting for one pastor to do everything. We are two congregations filled with living stones whom God has called, gifted, and placed for ministry.

So today, I would like us to reflect on three movements from this passage:

First, Christ Is the Living Stone
Second, We Are Living Stones Together
Third, We Are Called to Proclaim God's Grace

The key sentence for today is this:

The church is strongest when every member knows: I am a living stone in God's house, and God has a place and purpose for me.

First, Christ Is the Living Stone

Peter begins by saying, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight." Before Peter tells us who we are, he tells us who Christ is. Christ is the Living Stone.

This image may sound unusual at first. Stones are usually hard, silent, and lifeless. But Peter says Christ is the Living Stone because Jesus was rejected, crucified, and buried, yet God raised Him from the dead. He is alive. He is chosen. He is precious. He is the foundation of God's house.

Peter also reminds us that Jesus was rejected by human beings. The world did not always recognize His worth. Religious leaders rejected Him. Political powers condemned Him. The crowd turned away from Him. Yet what human beings rejected, God chose as precious.

This is good news for the church. Sometimes the church may feel small. Sometimes ministry may feel difficult. Sometimes people may think the church is not important anymore. Sometimes congregations may worry about the future, about numbers, money, leadership, or attendance.

But Peter reminds us that the church does not begin with our strength. The church begins with Christ. Christ is the Living Stone. Christ is chosen by God. Christ is precious. Christ is alive. Christ is the foundation.

Let me give a simple example. When people build a house, they do not begin with the curtains, the paint color, or the furniture. They begin with the foundation. If the foundation is strong, the house can stand. If the foundation is weak, even a beautiful house is in danger.

In the same way, the church must always return to its foundation. Our foundation is not our building, history, budget, pastor, program, tradition, or personal preference. Our foundation is Jesus Christ.

This is why every congregation must keep asking: Is Christ at the center? When we make decisions, are we seeking Christ? When we face challenges, are we trusting Christ? When we serve, are we pointing people to Christ? When we worship, are we coming to Christ with open hearts?

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) teaches that Christ gives the church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. This means the church does not belong to us first. The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

In this new shared ministry, the first question is not only, "How will everything be arranged?" The deeper question is, "How will we stay close to Christ together?"

Peter says, "Come to him." That is the first calling of the church. Before we build, before we serve, before we organize, before we plan, we come to Christ.

We come to Christ in worship. We come to Christ in prayer. We come to Christ in Scripture. We come to Christ at the Lord's Table. We come to Christ when we are tired. We come to Christ when we are hopeful. We come to Christ when we do not know the way.

So the application for us is simple: come to Christ again. This week, before we speak, plan, worry, or serve, let us pause and say, "Lord Jesus, You are the Living Stone. Build us on You. Keep us close to You."

A church is alive only when it stays close to the Living Christ.

Second, We Are Living Stones Together

Peter continues, "And like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood." This is a wonderful image.

Peter does not say, "You are a pile of stones." He says, "You are being built into a spiritual house." A pile of stones may have many strong pieces, but they are not yet connected. When a builder places each stone in the right place, the stones become a house.

This means every believer matters, but no believer stands alone. A living stone is important, but a living stone needs other living stones. God builds us together.

This is very important in our culture. Many people are used to being individual. We may say, "My faith is private," or "I can believe in God by myself." Personal faith does matter. Each person must come to Christ. But Peter says God is building us into a spiritual house. Christian faith is personal, but it is never meant to be lonely.

We need one another. A church is not made of one stone. A church is not made of one pastor. A church is not made of one family. A church is not made of one committee. A church is not made of one generation. The church is made of living stones, built together by God.

Imagine a stone wall. One stone may look ordinary by itself. But when many stones are placed together with care, they become strong. Some stones are large. Some are small. Some are smooth. Some are rough. Some are very visible. Some are hidden inside the wall. But all of them help the wall stand.

That is the church. Some members serve visibly, like preaching, singing, teaching, reading Scripture, playing music, leading committees, or serving as elders and deacons. Others serve quietly, like praying, preparing coffee, visiting the sick, writing cards, giving faithfully, cleaning, repairing, encouraging children, welcoming visitors, or listening to someone who is lonely.

Some stones are seen. Some stones are hidden. But every living stone matters.

The PC(USA) Book of Order says, "The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God." It also teaches that ordered ministries are given so the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. In other words, pastors, elders, and deacons are not called to replace the ministry of the congregation. They are called to help the congregation’s ministry grow.

This is especially important for shared ministry. The pastor can preach, lead, visit, guide, and equip. But the pastor cannot be every stone in the house. The pastor is one living stone among many living stones. Elders are living stones. Deacons are living stones. Choir members are living stones. Youth are living stones. Children are living stones. Longtime members are living stones. New visitors are invited to become living stones.

The church is strongest when every member knows, "I am needed. I have a place. God has given me a purpose."

So here is the application: ask God, "Lord, where have You placed me in this spiritual house?" Maybe God has placed you to pray. Maybe God has placed you to encourage. Maybe God has placed you to teach. Maybe God has placed you to visit. Maybe God has placed you to welcome. Maybe God has placed you to help with youth. Maybe God has placed you to serve on session. Maybe God has placed you to support mission. Maybe God has placed you to notice those who feel unseen.

This week, choose one ministry action. Call one person who may need encouragement. Pray for one church leader by name. Invite one person to coffee fellowship. Write one note of thanks. Ask one young person how they are doing. Offer to help with one small church task. Or simply pray, "Lord, show me my place as a living stone."

Small acts become holy when they are offered to Christ.

Third, We Are Called to Proclaim God's Grace

Peter says in verse 9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

This is not only identity. This is mission.

Peter gives the church beautiful names: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people. But these names are not given so the church can feel proud. They are given so the church can proclaim God's grace.

Peter says God has called us out of darkness into marvelous light. That means every Christian has a testimony. Not every testimony is dramatic in the same way. Some people come to faith suddenly. Some grow in faith slowly. Some have known church since childhood. Some return after many years away. Some are still learning. But every believer can say, "God has shown me grace. God has brought light into my life."

To proclaim God's mighty acts does not mean only preaching from the pulpit. It means the whole church speaks and shows the goodness of God.

We proclaim God's grace when we worship. We proclaim God's grace when we sing. We proclaim God's grace when we forgive. We proclaim God's grace when we welcome strangers. We proclaim God's grace when we care for the suffering. We proclaim God's grace when we teach children. We proclaim God's grace when we serve the community. We proclaim God's grace when we live with hope.

Think about a lighthouse. A lighthouse does not exist for itself. A lighthouse shines so that others can find the way. In the same way, the church does not exist only for itself. God calls the church out of darkness into light so that the church may shine for others.

The PC(USA) Book of Order says the congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. That means CPC Plainview is called to proclaim God's grace in Plainview. CPC

Rochester is called to proclaim God's grace in Rochester. Each congregation has its own context, but both are called to shine the same light of Christ.

The Brief Statement of Faith says the Holy Spirit calls women and men to all ministries of the Church, gives courage to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, and empowers us to serve Christ in our daily tasks. This is very close to Peter's vision. God's people are called not only to receive grace, but to proclaim grace.

So here is the application: where is God calling you to proclaim His grace this week? Maybe at home. Maybe at work. Maybe at school. Maybe in a hospital room. Maybe in a nursing home. Maybe in a conversation after worship. Maybe by serving quietly. Maybe by inviting someone who feels far from God. Maybe by sharing how Christ has helped you.

The church proclaims God's grace not only by sermons, but by the whole life of God's people.

This week, share one sentence of grace with someone. Say, "I am praying for you." Say, "God has not forgotten you." Say, "You are welcome here." Say, "Christ gives us hope." Say, "Thank you for the way you serve." Say, "I see God's love in you."

Simple words can become light. Simple actions can become witness. Simple faithfulness can help someone see Christ.

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters in Christ, 1 Peter 2 gives us a powerful picture of the church.

> *Christ is the Living Stone.*
> *We are living stones together.*
> *We are called to proclaim God's grace.*

The church is not made of passive spectators. The church is a spiritual house made of living stones. Every believer matters. Every gift matters. Every prayer matters. Every visit matters. Every meal matters. Every song matters. Every committee matters. Every act of service matters. Every word of encouragement matters.

The church is not only the pastor's ministry. The church is the ministry of the whole people of God.

So let us come to Christ, the Living Stone. Let us allow God to build us together. Let us discover our place in God's spiritual house. Let us proclaim the grace of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

And let this sentence guide us:

> *The church is strongest when every member knows: I am a living stone in God's house, and God has a place and purpose for me.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reference Notes

1. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Order 2025-2027, F-1.0201; G-1.0101; G-2.0101-G-2.0102.

2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith, lines 52-80.

3. Paul J. Achtemeier, 1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, commentary on 1 Peter 2:4-10.

4. Joseph D. Small, Flawed Church, Faithful God: A Reformed Ecclesiology for the Real World. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

5. Letty M. Russell, Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.