

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

5 Easter  
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Fr Bill McGinty

**“The Living Stones”**

When I was a boy we used to collect rocks. Not just any rocks, but special rocks from special places. A stone from the Atlantic shoreline at Malin Head or Bundoran, a rock we found on the top of a mountain or in a river bed. We would search until we found it, and choose it because of its shape or color or just because it was unusual. Rocks spoke to us of permanence, when we already knew that nothing was permanent or lasted forever. Vacations are soon over, friends leave, people split up and parents die. I suppose in our childish way, we believed that somehow a rock or stone would remind us of a good time, or a good place, long after we had moved on to other things.

Today, the writer of 1 Peter is thinking along the same lines. In this letter, chapter 2, he is seemingly obsessed with the word ‘stone’. He tells his listeners that they must become “living stones.” The living stones of God’s church, his house, and they can only do that by living spiritual lives of sacrifice through Jesus Christ.

What he is saying to them is encoded in these few lines. He chooses his words carefully knowing that his Jewish listeners know their “Hebrew History” and what he is saying to them is this:

“Once we Israelites were slaves in Egypt. There we quarried stone to build a great city. For us it was the “stone of death” that daily killed hundreds of our people. We slaved to build a pagan city, till God set us free.”

What Christ our Lord is now asking of us is to build a new kind of city, not with “dead stones” but with real people, living and giving of their time and effort freely.

By building up Christ you acknowledge that he is the foundation of our lives and our salvation. In participating in his Kingdom we all become priest, because we part-take in his priesthood; we involve ourselves in his mission, we become God’s people.

1 Peter could not have more accurately painted a picture of parish life. It tells us that we are stones. Stones of all shapes and sizes. Big stones, little stones, beautiful stones, ugly stones. We are bright stones and dull stones and stones of every color and hew. Because we all belong, none of that matters. What does matter is what 1 Peter challenges us to be. Will we be ‘dead stones’ or ‘living stones?’

For if we choose to be ‘living stones’ then we have chosen to be an activity, an activity, a community that daily continues the mission and saving work of Christ in this place.

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# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

Let us be quite clear. We are called and commissioned by the Gospel to be 'living stones.' We are mandated to live out the teaching and the Kingdom of Christ right here in Milford. It is not an abstract notion, it is not some vague idea whereby we pick and choose those parts of the Gospel that suit us. We are called by Baptism to witness to Christ throughout the year and to do his work. That work includes taking up his cross and knowing the meaning of sacrifice, suffering and pain. We can be 'living stones' in this church of Christ who sit with the sick, bury the dead, comfort the cancer patient an toil with maintenance, finances, home visits, and then have time to feed the poor in the Food Pantry. It is all our calling.

If the sum total of our involvement as members were that we simply have the right to call ourselves Episcopalian then we would indeed be dead stones, but all around us, you and I are privileged to be living among 'living stones' who are unafraid to take the Gospel and bring it alive in practical ways right here where they live.

Every Wednesday night a car leaves Milford and winds its way up Route 6 and on to 739. It carries Linda Troise to her mission among the women inmates at the Pike County Prison. She travels alone and she works unassisted. She carries her Bible in her hand. She longs for help to carry this work on, but there is none. Wednesday is half way through her week. She has answered telephones, ran the parish office, directed the Greeters and Evangelism ministry, had meetings with Rainbow Youth, sang in the Pike County Choral, rehearsed with the Good Shepherd Choir, she is a member of Vestry and oh yes, she produced the service bulletins you are reading today. Saturday you may well find her back at church at a meeting of the "Walk-a-Thon Committee". All of this she has done over the last six weeks with a broken right hand. She is a 'living stone' she is a cornerstone. She makes the rest of us feel we are standing still.

Linda's partner in the office, Beverly Young is no less an inspiration. Last week she survived a cancer operation. It was one she postponed, to care for her sick daughter Becky, for 12 months. Becky has breast cancer at 27. Beverly has been there for her with her husband Tom. Together they have made the journey back up to the Adirondacks on many occasions. They have cared weeks on end, for their two baby grand children. Beverly has done all this while taking care of business in the parish office. She is the Child Care Center officer in charge of overseeing the Child Care. She runs meetings, meets with the Directors and Book keeper. She fund raises and reviews employee manuals, reports and parent concerns. She is a timeless Vestry member for her ministry, as well as being the clerk of the Vestry.

Both these women are members of 'shared ministry'. It is the framework that our church is using to involve the entire church in ministry and in Christ's work. All together we have 11 ministries led by Vestry each one building up its own team. Daily that ministry grows in God's grace.

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5 years ago you all asked for a more vibrant, growing church. God has answered your prayers. You did not stop at mere words and but sprung to action the convictions of your hearts, when your Christ and your church needed you.

I could stand here all day and talk to you of 'living stones' who live among you: Nancy, Katie Ruzanski, Lucie Brooks, Janine, Bertrand, John Yanick, Lois, Fran Hlavacek, Susanna, Richard Selnick, Valerie Bernhardt, Al, Bonnie, Mike, Frank, Maryann. The list goes on and on.

They are the 'living stones' that are building Christ's church with their sacrifices on a daily basis. 'Shared ministry' works best when the rest of us refuse to sit back and watch those sacrifices, benefit from those sacrifices, but we stand and decide to be; 'living stones' ourselves.

"Let us work," said Jesus, "while there is still light for the darkness will come when no man can work."

Today's Gospel reminds us of this. Everyone in my generation can now see the end of the journey. We have lived through eleven presidents; we have seen the world change. It only remains for us to make a good end and to leave a legacy to those who come after. In the Gospel Christ promises a house in his eternal Kingdom to all who would follow him. "I am the way, the truth and the life," he tells Thomas, "he who follows me will have the light of life."

Paul tells us that our faith or "I believe" cannot be mere words, it must be followed by a lived faith. It is that lived faith that Christ calls us to. He tells Philip we do not have to be alone in our following of him. He tells him that he will be there with us every step of the way.

If this church is our 'living Christ' then what we build today will be there for us when we too are called back to dwell in his Fathers House.

"If in my name you ask anything then I will do it," says Jesus. Well we are asking. Today we are asking that you Christ, the Son of God, complete the work that you began in us, all those years ago, That all may become 'living stones' and that the 'living stones' that toil for you here, may have strength and new life. This we ask in Christ's name.

Amen+

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