

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 14 – August 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

### 1 Peter 2:4-10

<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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.”**

<sup>7</sup>Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

**“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”<sup>8</sup> and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”**

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dear chosen people of God,

How old do you think St. Luke's is? This present sanctuary was built in 1960 making it roughly 56 years old. The entry way and school were built in 1999 making them about 17 years old. St. Luke's congregation was started in 1848. It had in the past worshipped in a church buildings located on the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> St. and Madison Street starting in 1851. They were in that location for about 109 years. That would mean that St. Luke's has been in existence for about 168 years. It is kind of neat to look back at the history of this church and the buildings and their architecture that have been built to serve the ministry and people of St. Luke's over these past 168 years. But as nice as all these buildings were and are, we also have to be realists: no church building stands forever. Some buildings simply wear out: beams sag, foundations crack, and at some just plain get to be too small.

God has an interest in architecture too. He gave Noah the plans for a life-saver of an ark. He not only chaired, but was the building committee of Moses' Tabernacle in the desert and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Believers could only exclaim: **“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!”** (Ps. 84). This morning, God is still chairing a building committee: not for another temple in Jerusalem or any other earthly congregation. God is rolling up his sleeves to design and build a living temple made up of living people. To quote St. Paul to the Corinthians: **“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you (1 Cor. 6)?”**

And how does God's great building plan begin: with a cornerstone. But not just any old cornerstone.

## **Theme: Jesus Is Our Cornerstone!**

- 1. We build on him**
- 2. We live for him**

### **1. We build on him**

**“As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— ... 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." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.”**

In ancient times down to just a few centuries ago, the process of building was rather simple. They often times relied on three simple tools: a plum line, a straight rod, and a square. But the most important element of getting the building done right? The CORNERSTONE. We usually think of cornerstones as time capsules containing newspapers, coins, books, and bulletins from a groundbreaking. But not an old-school cornerstone. The cornerstone was the PERFECT stone - it determined the level of the building and the angle of the walls. Soaring gothic cathedrals sprang up and out from this one single stone.

What should God use for the cornerstone in his living temple? Granite isn't tough enough. Diamonds aren't precious enough. There is only ONE who is worthy to be the Cornerstone of the Father's living temple: the Son. The Son begotten of the Father, the perfect image of the Father, the Son who pleased the Father, this SON is precious to the Father. Precious and perfect - that's Christ the Cornerstone. Hymn 528 sings it: “Christ is our cornerstone; on him ALONE we build.”

Pastor Gartner, of course we build on Christ! Indeed, I pray that that is truly the case with each and every one of us here this morning. But do you truly internalize that it is an honest-to-God miracle - a jaw-dropping miracle - each and every time someone is built upon Christ through faith? Look at what Scripture says. How well was God's Precious Stone received? Jesus Christ is a stone rejected by men... a stone rejected by the builders... stone rejected... a stone that causes men to stumble and fall.

Think of it! Jesus is born, and Herod wants to kill him. Jesus speaks the Word in his hometown, and they run him out of town. Jesus forgives sins, and Pharisees want to know who gave him the right! Jesus drives out a demon, and he's accused of being Satan. Jesus drove out the demon Legion and the people begged him to leave their area. Jesus rose up a 4-day dead Lazarus from the dead, and the Pharisees made plans to kill him and re-kill Lazarus! And then there was the crowd cheering on Good Friday: Away with him! Give us Barabbas! Rejected. Thrown away. Tossed away like a broken brick.

Rejected why? Because he wasn't the kind of Christ they were looking for. Beating up on Roman legions or handing out free bread? THAT they could understand. THAT, they felt, they could use. But claiming to be THE Way, the TRUTH, and the LIFE. Claiming to be the Father's Son? That's a bit much. Why, it seemed that Jesus was so heavenly minded, he wasn't any earthly good! And so his own people rejected him. Threw him away. No, threw him onto a cross!

And it still is the case today... I could rip on Hollywood, but I won't. I could go into how weird some New Age beliefs are, but there's nothing new there. Why? Not because we don't care about society or what people believe. But because Hollywood isn't sitting in Watertown's pews this morning. You and I are! We struggle - struggle daily - with rejecting the Cornerstone. There is an old sinner in each of us that

wants to toss the Cornerstone for something more convenient - something easier. Slowly, God's will becomes man's suggestions. Slowly, but surely, God's Word and Worship are no longer our life; they become nice hobbies that we practice right along with golf and the Packers. The Good News is preached! And eyes wander, mouths yawn, minds dream. And then there is that terrible truth that settles into us when we really put two and two together: if Jesus alone is precious and worth everything, then by ourselves without Jesus - we're worth \_\_\_\_\_ ... Ouch! I don't know... Is Jesus really that big of a deal? Careful! 'Don't trip!' Stumbling over Christ and his Word? That's gonna hurt!

Praise God, we know the truth. Jesus is THE Cornerstone. Jesus is YOUR Cornerstone. He is, just as he says in John 14, the WAY. Any direction that Jesus isn't taking the lead is a detour. Jesus is the TRUTH. Anything that isn't enlightened by Jesus is a lie. Jesus is the LIFE. Anything that is not life in Christ ends only in death. Praise God, you believe in him - which means that you, brothers and sisters, are built upon him.

## 2. We live for him

God has built you upon his Son the cornerstone. Life, forgiveness, and salvation come to you through your foundation upon Christ the Cornerstone. But unlike a pyramid sitting in the desert in Egypt or a cathedral sitting in a field in France, you aren't dead stones. You, brothers and sisters, are LIVING stones who live for the Cornerstone:

**“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.... 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”**

Who are you? That's an important question! We tend to classify ourselves in all sorts of ways. I am a man. I'm an American. I'm a German, French, and English American. I'm a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran. I'm a member of St. Luke's. I'm a Packer, Brewers, Badger fan. You get the picture. But is any of this who you REALLY are? You are a **“chosen people”**. You are a **“holy nation.”** You are **“a people who belonging to God.”** There are hundreds of countries on planet earth. But there are really only two nations - two peoples: those built on Christ and those not, those with the light of Christ and those still in darkness, those who believe and those who don't. We are a people, a nation, not because of the language we speak or the blood in our veins, but because of the Lamb's blood that was shed! Translation? You have far more in common with the Chinese Christian you will never meet, than with the unbelieving uncle or cousin that you grew up with! In a world of darkness, the Lord has turned on the light of truth in your hearts. In a world at war with itself, you are at peace with God. In a world where people are used and abused and life is cheap, you are a precious people to your God and Father. **“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” (Col. 1:13).**

But there is more! You are also a **“royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices”** to God. This is a precious truth! In Old Testament times, it was the priest who served as the go-between between God and man. The priest offered your sacrifices. The priest offered prayers. The priest spoke from God to you. The priest spoke for you to God. Christ, our great High Priest, has made you - his people into priests! You, in

Christ, have direct - complete - total access to the heart of your heavenly Father in prayer. As priests, you are God's mouthpieces to the world. Lutherans don't think they believe in priests. According to 1 Peter 2 - I'm looking at a room filled with them!

So as priests, what should we sacrifice? How about some little lambs? No: how about our LIVES! How about a bull? No: how about our BODIES! How about some grapes? No: How about all our GOODS! Christ, as Priest, sacrificed himself, so that we as priests, can sacrifice our lives with joy for Jesus! Everything that Christ has accomplished belongs to you - it's all yours! A new lease on life, forgiveness of sins, access to God, a place prepared in heaven - Priests of God, it's all yours! THAT'S reality.

How odd then to hear things like this: "all the church wants is my money." I've heard that over the years. And if you are thinking along those lines, then let me be frank: you don't understand God, the world, or yourself! GOD wants your money? Don't kid yourself! The God who gave you life and redeemed your life wants your life. The world: do we really think we own a chunk of it? We didn't create it. And we certainly won't take a piece of it along with us. The shirt on your back and the house you call home are blessings on loan from God. And myself? Has God called me to be a miser adding up dollars given and tallying up minutes I've volunteered? No. That's not who we are in Christ.

Who are you? You, brothers and sisters, are the "**chosen people**" of God, you are God's "**holy nation**", you are God's "**royal priests**". You are a people who have everything to thank God for — a people, if there ever was one, who have something to talk about! Simply put: you are a people who are GIFTED FOR PRAISE! Amen.