

Scripture Reading:

1 Peter 2: 2-10

John 14:1-14

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, ...” 1 Peter 2:4-5

“Did you see what Peter did there? In just one sentence and with one metaphor he made a stunning affirmation regarding the nature of Jesus, and the nature of those who would follow in the Way of Jesus. In one sentence he affirms that Jesus and we are made of the same material, that we share the same elements and miraculous capacity. We are stones...unmoving, formidable, capable of bearing great burdens, able to be a firm foundation for great things. And, we are living...living stones. Somehow the strength of our faith is both static, unchangeable and, at the same time, it is also malleable and organic. What seems fixed and immovable turns out to have agency and energy. And, we share those capacities with Jesus. We can to all intents and purposes appear unchanged, steadfast, the same person we were the day before, but something within us is changeable, and capable, through our affinity with Jesus, of changing others.”¹

I read a devotional by Jennifer Brownell this week that at first rocked the boat for me and then I sat with it for a moment. This is what she wrote

“It was a day just like this in early spring, when I told a new spiritual director my secret. It seemed like such a fatal flaw for a ministry student that I could hardly speak it aloud.

"Half the time," I whispered, "I don't even believe in God."

She gave an impatient, little snort. "You're standing with one foot on the dock and one foot in the boat. Just get in the boat, Jennifer!"

Brownell continued Before, caring teachers and pastors with the very best intentions had painted a picture of faith as a meandering journey, twisting and detouring. If you don't feel God with you, they implied, just keep moving. It doesn't matter that much, and wherever you are headed is bound to be interesting.

But as my spiritual director and I continued our conversation that spring day, I realized I hadn't been on a journey after all. I had been stuck on the dock, one foot in and one foot out, knowing that I was called away from all that was familiar and safe, but afraid to get in the boat.

¹ Bowman, Debra <https://www.facebook.com/2195West45/posts/1378209195580584:0>

"Just get in the boat," she said. "God will show you the way." So I did. And She did."²

As a counsellor and minister I usually try sit and listen to a persons faith journey and be very open to where they are on their own journey but sometimes people need to be challenged on their stuff and I have learned people will either take it as a challenge or leave the challenge and most likely the challenger behind. When you are addicted to being unhappy or unhealthy, when you are committed to being uncommitted sometimes taking aggressive steps to healing and wholeness are just too much. We are all only as ready as we can and/or choose to be. That is one of the reasons being a part of a community of faith and hopefully of support is so important. We help one another get in the boat and travel to the other side.

All of our scriptures today remind us of our foundation. They remind us that we are a living part of the most Holy God and that the Creator is a part of us. If we truly believe that, if we honestly rest in our foundations we will be mighty. Our hearts will not be troubled, we will trust in the way and the truth, we would know we are a chosen people, living stones. We would build a a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Our scripture continues "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," 8and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."

Did you know that originally we hoped to call Centrepoint - Cornerstone, but unfortunately some folks down the road beat us to the name. As a minister I was rather 'chuffed' that Sea to Sky Community Services was going to fall into building a spiritual Centre named right out of the bible and they didn't even know it. I had a bit of hope that a foundational name might help ground us. Centrepoint however speaks to the same thing. Where are we Centred? Who are we to be centred in? What is our foundation? Sometimes I wonder if we have forgotten.

My heart spent some time with Paul this week I found myself drawn to read Galatians. I didn't get far because in the first few verses I remembered why my heart had gone to Galatia. In the 6th verse Paul says to the people of Galatia "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all." (Gal. 1:6) You see I had a conversation this week, and it is not the first time I have had this kind of conversation as the minister of Squamish United, but it was with a new person this time, and you know what they said. They said "Karen I long to come back to church but the negativity is just too hard." When I go to church I want to be in a community of love and faith, I want to feel upheld, loved and lifted, but there is so much bitterness and grumbling I can't be there. I've tried. I sit through a service and I feel uplifted and fed but then as soon as coffee time starts the grumbling starts.

² Get in the Boat Jennifer Brownell Still Speaking Daily Devotional

Does your heart sink with those words? Mine did, it still does. But not with a defensive sinking, with a longing. I long for us to go to the cornerstone to be fed like a newborn babe suckling the rich milk that gives us the foundations for life. And yet what I see and hear is not grounded in faith and love it is grounded in discontent and dispute. It is about seeking human approval rather than being living stones. Just as Paul pleads in the first chapter of Galatians my heart longs for us to remember who we are, what our purpose is. I have to admit that in the last several years I have shied away from saying these things. Likely because I am just as human as the rest of you and I am scared to be rejected anymore than I already am but this week I heard the words loud and clear “GET INTO THE BOAT!”

Folks we have two beautiful communities of faith in this room, I speak more directly to United Church members today, but I know in our humanity we all need to be reminded from time to time what the call of the church is. I know we are not alone in our grumbling, in our losing our foundation from time to time. In the last weeks - okay really in the last years my heart has often been heavy when I have heard the grumbling, the gossip, the discontent. I know some of you are not happy with the leadership, mine and or that of the boards. I know that some of you are raging about the finances, I know that some of you are unhappy and feeling dishonoured by Sea to Sky Community Services, I know that even in the Centrepoint tours last week I heard mostly grumbles, I know that some are frustrated that I spend so much energy on something called Messy Church.

And right now I am shaking in my boots because I know some of you will not be happy with my plea. But you see I also know that my faith is found in the cornerstone, in Christ. The gospel I preach is not one I make up along the way - at least I pray it is not. I know that our faith as followers of Jesus calls us to live and be different. And in response I also know that your leadership, your board and even I work hard for you, wrestle, vision, plan and pray for you. I know that our board and beyond has wrestled, lost sleep over, and even cried over our finances (the money of church - that is what we spend most of our time on - and that is what we get the most pressure over because it is perceived we don't care. My friends - I know why we can't find a treasurer because I'm not sure anyone would take the job even if we were to pay someone for it). I know that when I approached Lois and Estelle one more time about folks feeling they don't recognize what we have given them I was met with tears and heavy hearts because they do recognize, because they do care, because they are grateful and they are so sad that you don't know and or see it. So grateful that they asked me to stand up, be acknowledged and speak on our behalf at their fundraising Gala. I also know that one of the guests on our Centrepoint tours was shocked that people were not grateful, and blown away with excitement. Surprised that Chris got more grief than gratitude. I know I felt the same energy too. And lastly I know that Messy Church is a place where people are finding the foundations of life-giving faith, where families are coming and engaging and being filled up. (In fact I think it is one of the amazing things we could continue to do together).

My friends “Come to him, a living stone,... chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, ...” 1 Peter 2:4-5 Some of you are sitting

here wondering what I'm talking about, others are thinking about who those grumblers are, and some of you might be sitting as I did in a pastoral conversation this week and say. Yes. Let's get in the boat, let's go back to our foundation. Some of you are here because you are fed, you do feel community, you do feel love and for that I am truly grateful. For those of you who don't I invite you to join us. Some of us in the last week have committed to working on being different, on being positive. We will be regularly praying for our communities of faith and how we move forward in truth and love so that we participate as Christ calls us. "You have heard it said, "Life is not about the destination, it's about the journey," but that's not what the Gospel of John would say. For John, the destination, eternal life, is the journey. In other words, what you aim for must be present in every step along the way.

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh once put it this way: "There is no way to peace, peace is the way. Heaven or hell are available right now depending on how we walk."³

St. John's and Squamish United as we together one way or another head into this new phase of life and ministry we have an opportunity to be a life-giving, spiritual house of faith and community. Are we going to get into the boat, are we going to be nourished in our faith so that others will be blessed by our changed lives in Jesus? This is it. Let's do this together - not just us but with God. The purpose of our churches in this journey is not to discover who we want to be it is to discover who God would have us to be. What is God's purpose for us? Jesus said "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." Do we believe? Will we follow? Let us build a house that's foundation is the cornerstone not of our human understanding but of Jesus, of faith and truth, of love and life, of grace and humility, of justice and truth. We have it within us, we are the living stones. Let us so live.

³ I Am the Way, Matthew Laney Still Speaking Devotional May 14, 2017