

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 10, 2020  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**Images of the Savior: Cornerstone**

### **1 Peter 2:4–10 (NIV84)**

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 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. 6 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.” 7 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,” 8 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. 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Peter has used the image of Jesus as both Lamb and Shepherd. Now Peter turns to what might be a very personal image of the Savior for him. Peter’s name had not always been Peter. His given name was Simon, the son of Jonah. However, Jesus gave him the name Cephas in Aramaic, which is Peter in Greek. Both Cephas and Peter mean “rock.” As Peter describes Jesus as the Living Stone and the Cornerstone, and as he describes believers as the living stones of God’s spiritual house, he must have thought of the day Jesus gave him the name, Peter, the rock.

As we consider Jesus as the Cornerstone today, we first see that Christ is the Cornerstone for our salvation. He is the Cornerstone of our personal faith. But Peter expands the image and we also see Jesus as the Cornerstone of the Holy Christian Church. There can be only one cornerstone for a building and Christ is that Cornerstone for our faith and the Church.

### **The Only Cornerstone for Your Salvation**

*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.” 7 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,” 8 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.*

Peter takes the image of Christ as the Cornerstone from the Old Testament and quotes verses from Isaiah and Psalms. The cornerstone in modern buildings is often a decorative stone, perhaps engraved with the year of the building like on our church building. Some may contain a time capsule with important documents and memories from the time the building was constructed. But in ancient buildings, the cornerstone was vital to the integrity of the building. The cornerstone set the lines for the building. If it was not square, the walls would not be square and the building would not look right or be structurally sound. Small errors in the cornerstone would be amplified into big errors in the building.

Peter’s use of the image of Christ as the Cornerstone tells us that Christ is not just a decorative part of our life.

Christ as Cornerstone is the most important and the starting point for our life with God now and eternal life in heaven forever. In the sinful state of rebellion that all humans are born into, we don't like being told how to build our lives. Those who do not yet have faith in Christ, see Christ only as an obstacle and something that gets in the way of living. They stumble over the Cornerstone as they attempt to avoid Christ. The crowds who called for the crucifixion of Christ were attempting to remove this stumbling block from among the Jews. But many of them would later discover that Christ Jesus is truly the most important Cornerstone, either at his resurrection or on the day of Pentecost. However, Peter tells us that some will continue in unbelief and *"they stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for."*

This translation is not as clear as it might be. It could be taken as if God has destined some people to unbelief, to disobey the message. But that is not the case as the Scriptures clearly tell us that God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Peter is pointing out the consequence of disobeying the message. If you see a sign on the road that says, "Bridge out!" and you ignore the sign and keep driving on the road, you are destined to falling off the bridge. Peter tells us that those who ignore the call of God in the law to repent and refuse to believe in Christ are destined to stumble and fall into hell. The end result of unbelief is hell.

While some continue to reject Christ, *"to you who believe, this stone is precious."* But is Christ always the only Cornerstone of our lives? While we may not actively try to avoid Christ in life, we may attempt to build our lives on more than one cornerstone. Some will build their life and hope of salvation on Christ and on themselves, on Christ and their good works. Sure, Jesus has done a lot to forgive me, but I will feel a lot better about getting to heaven if I do some good things in life. Building on Christ and good works is like building with a solid cornerstone in one corner and a cornerstone molded out of jello in another. Our own goodness is a shaky thing upon which to build our hope of heaven. Peter reminds us of Isaiah's words, *"the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* We will be put to shame if we trust in ourselves for we sin daily and surely deserve nothing good from God. But trusting in Christ is a sure thing. He never sinned and never failed to accomplish his goal of saving us from our sin. Build your life and hope on Christ, our sure Cornerstone.

Others may build on Christ plus finances or Christ plus politics or Christ plus reason. But finances fail. Politics change. Our reason is limited and often faulty. Anytime we attempt to build on another cornerstone or add a cornerstone to our life and hope of eternal life, the building becomes unstable. Christ is the only Cornerstone for our salvation. Built on the only true Cornerstone, this is what we now are:

*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.*

### **The Only Cornerstone of the Holy Christian Church**

Our hope of salvation is built upon Christ alone. As the Holy Spirit gathers us into faith in Christ, God builds us together to be part of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

*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.*

What a beautiful picture Peter gives us of the Church of all believers. Each believer is a living stone in God's Church. We are not bricks that all have similar appearance and strength. No, believers are living stones that are all different in appearance and background and strengths and abilities. Yet, our Lord skillfully builds us all

together into one, holy, united, body of believers in the Holy Christian Church. Christ, the Cornerstone is the key to this beautiful building, the one Church of all believers.

So why don't the local churches on earth look like this beautiful picture? Individual churches have troubles and strife and divisions and factions. Why? Because every local church is filled with sinners and only with sinners. The solution to strife and division is to get back to the Cornerstone. Repent and trust in Christ. Receive his forgiveness and forgive each other. There is beauty in a local group of believers who forgive each other as Christ has forgiven us.

But when we look around we also see that there are many different local groups of believers. There is the Methodist group, the Catholic group, the Presbyterian group, the Baptist group, the Lutheran group, and the groups that claim they are not part of a group by calling themselves non denominational. Why such fragmentation among the churches of this earth when there is only one, Holy Christian Church that consists of all believers? The problem comes when a local group of believers builds their faith and teachings on a cornerstone that is Christ, but slightly changed. Little errors in doctrine become big errors and soon the local group is no longer built on Christ at all but on something else entirely. Those who follow such teachings are also in danger of not being in the Holy Christian Church because they have left the Cornerstone that is Christ.

For example, some denominations allow the teaching to continue within them that says that God is female although God clearly describes himself as Father and Son, male terms. Some denominations allow the teaching that Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead on Easter even though the Scriptures clearly tell us the Christ bodily arose. Some denominations teach that Baptism does not save even though the Word of God tells us that Baptism saves. Some teach that the Lord's Supper is not Jesus true body and blood even though Jesus said that it is. Some teach that you must add works to faith in Christ in order to be saved, even though the Bible tells us that it is by grace we have been saved through faith and not by works.

Christ, as the Cornerstone, has set the lines for truth in his Church by the clear teaching in Holy Scripture. We cannot decide to simply ignore the Cornerstone and build anyway we like. Therefore, we have many denominations because of the many ways believers have chosen to diverge from the clear teachings of the Bible. Therefore, we cannot join together with a group of believers who teach and believe something contrary to Scripture, even if it seems minor at the time. Minor changes to the Cornerstone lead to big errors later. We must remain with Christ, the Cornerstone.

But don't think for one moment that we in the confessional Lutheran tradition are the only ones who are living stones in God's spiritual house. If our Lord can forgive such stubborn, hard-headed, sinners such as us, then he can forgive others too. If he can mold us into living stones in his Church, then he can bring anyone into his holy Christian Church. So, while we cannot yet see clearly the beauty of God's house of living stones, Peter lifts our eyes heavenward to that day when we will see Christ and his holy Church as part of that Church for all eternity. For now, that glory is hidden. But we will see it. For our hope of salvation is not built on ourselves, but on Christ, the Cornerstone.

Amen.