

## The Church's One Foundation

Grace, Mercy and peace are now yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Our text for our Sermon today is taken from our Epistle reading where the apostle Peter writes to us about God building something. God has begun a great, worldwide construction project built off the cornerstone Jesus. Peter is telling us that God is working here in this place God is building here. So what I talked with the kids about in our children's message for today is true. Welcome to God's construction site. God is building here at Mountain View Lutheran Church and School. Yet he isn't building with the tools that we are familiar with. He isn't using a hammer and nails he isn't using lumber and steel, he is using us.

Peter tells us that God's construction site here is full of living stones. He is using the people of God, he is shaping them, forming them and building with them. He is building in this place a Spiritual house, He is building the church with people like you and me. He is building His church with Living stones on the foundation that is Jesus. The imagery is beautiful to think about. The beauty of the entire church from all corners of the world united together as one on the rock that is Christ. Building into a large and beautiful house of worship where God is given praise and worshiped.

While it sounds beautiful is this a present reality? As we survey God's construction site, what are we to see here? We can imagine God as this master builder and think of all the things he could create, when we do the possibilities are endless. Frankly as we look around at this construction site, it is a little concerning. We hear about the church around the world. In some places living stones are killed for what they believe, for who they are. The church is under attack from the outside. Here in the United States we do not face the persecution that others face, but we have problems of our own. We hear the doom and gloom statements that the church is in decline. Christians are declining

the “none’s” or no religion are rising. God is losing more and more living stones to use for His kingdom. This isn’t a faraway concern, but we feel it in Friends and family who have left the church, who have walked away from the faith. The church is under attack from the inside as well. For the stones on the inside a quick look at oneself and our sins questions whether we should even be a part of this holy building. Being a part of this construction site where God is working to build his kingdom we are left with many questions. What does it even look like to be a part of God’s church, to be a living stone in God’s construction site? What is God doing? What is He building here in this place? Why is he doing it the way he is? What is the purpose of all of this?

A few minutes ago, we sang one of my favorite hymns: The Church’s one Foundation. The song itself is almost 200 years old, but I feel like it was written to address our concerns we just raised today. For it too was written in a difficult time for the church. At the tail end of the 1800 the church in South Africa was struggling. The church of living stones struggled with their own identity, what does it mean to be a member of God’s building project. A prominent Bishop at the time recently began to teach that the Gospels were fictional or inaccurate. The foundation of the church itself – Christ – was called into question. Was he truly who He said he was? Can we trust him? It sent the congregations in South Africa into chaos. What does this mean to be a Christian? What is the foundation of who we are in the Church?

The issue eventually found its way to England and a man named Samuel Stone, what a fitting name. Samuel pens a new Hymn where he seeks to offer comfort to the African churches in turmoil. Samuel gives us a beautiful picture of what is unseen. A picture of what God is building at this construction site, what this church actually looks like. Samuel’s lyrics guide us past the sin and brokenness we see in the Church to see what God is building. He writes the Church’s one foundation that helps give direction to us living stones. It guides us to look at our foundation for our assurance. So lets take a look

at this famous song. If you would like to follow along you can open your hymnal to hymn number 644.

Samuel Stone begins with the very core of the church. The Corner stone as Peter puts it. He describes it from the bottom to the top. He starts with the foundation on which it sits. The part of God's building project that upholds the rest. He writes: The Church's one foundation Is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heav'n He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died.

Jesus Christ is the foundation of this glorious church God is building. This Spiritual house is held together in Christ. Us living stones are shaped and built upon him and upon Jesus God's spiritual house either stands or falls. Samuel reminds us what made us the living stones we are today. He reminds us the good news of the gospel that Jesus Christ came to earth and lived amongst us. He lived the perfect life you and I could not live, and he took upon himself the sins of the world and died. Taking our sin and brokenness to the grave. Jesus sought out you and me, he claimed us as His own. In our baptisms God's name was put on us and we were made living stones in God's church. We were made brothers and sisters in Christ on Christ the foundation.

God's building begins with this certain and sure foundation. The work of God begins in Christ his cornerstone as Peter calls it. Jesus has purchased us with his own blood and brought us into this beautiful church. All of these are acts of God. God died, rose and makes us living stones. This firm foundation is what we can depend on. It is the rock. The cornerstone God builds on.

Samuel continues this image in verse two: Elect from ev'ry nation; Yet one o'er all the earth; Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth. One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food, And to one hope she presses With ev'ry grace endued.

God has called these living stones from every corner of the world. It isn't just 12 disciples in the desert of Israel, but the message has gone out into the world. He seeks people from high low class, rich and poor, strong and weak young and old. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are from, God's call goes out into all the world and where His word is spoken, disciples are made. Living stones are formed and created. In God's building all are made one. From across the world made one, Under one Lord Jesus, holding to one true faith, holding to the one baptism that unite us partaking in the one meal, the Lord's supper together. As one, God pours His grace out on these living stones, He unites us with the corner stone. He sets our foundation on Jesus.

Verses one and two offer a really idealistic view of what the church looks like. Verse three gives a different look to this building. It becomes all too familiar with us. He writes  
Though with a scornful wonder The world sees her oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up,  
"How long?" And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song.

Here Samuel gives a little bit of a reality check. He recalls the pain of the struggling African churches and asks is the church really one? We do not have to go far to ask the same question. I am sure many of you passed on your way in this morning a number of different churches. Baptist, Methodist, Prebreyten, catholic the list goes on. The living stones seemed to be divided on every front. How can Christ the corner stone make us one, if we are so split? Brother is separated from brother and there doesn't seem to be an end to it.

We don't even have to look outside of ourselves to see this division within the church. We only need to look to ourselves. God has called us to be living stones, we are called to be a new creation. Yet do we act like our calling would have us do? Are we the holy priesthood that Peter calls us? Do we live as though our only foundation is Christ? We look at ourselves and we see our sin. We see how we do not love one another as living

stone should. We hurt, spite and despise our neighbor. We say words that hurt, we selfishly look after ourselves above others and we often fail to do what is right. We fail in our relationship to God when we do not live according to His will. When we look to other sources for our foundation. For our meaning and purpose in life.

Our sins and our divisions as living stones rise up before us and with the saints of all time we cry out – How long – How long Lord will you let this go on? What are you going to do?

Verse 4 summarizes how we feel: Through toil and tribulation And tumult of her war  
She waits the consummation Of peace forevermore Till with the vision glorious Her  
longing eyes are blest, And the great church victorious Shall be the church at rest.

This building of God is at war. We struggle with Satan, with Sin with the world and even our own desires and wants. We face persecution, it becomes a social disadvantage to proclaim Christ, The world would have make our foundation what is fleeting. Wealth, power, influence. It seeks to take us off what is sure and certain but difficult and put us towards what is easy and fleeting. Churches close, Christians suffer, sin destroys relationships between one another. Yet this time of struggle, this war will come to an end.

God calls us to remember our foundation. To remember our cornerstone. Our hope is certain, not because things seem to be going well. Not because we are sinless and spotless and deserve a spot in this church, but because of who God has made us to be. He has declared living stones in his church and nothing can take that away from us. Our church is built on Christ. Not even the gates of hell can prevail over it. We await that day that God finishes His building. With the saints of all time we are blest and the church that is rooted to Christ is victorious with Him over sin death and the devil and is brought into eternal rest.

Samuel Concludes our hymn with the beautiful vision of what God is building: Yet she on earth has union With God, the Three in One, And mystic sweet communion With

those whose rest is won. O blessed heav'nly chorus! Lord, save us by Your grace That we, like saints before us, May see You face to face.

Throughout our struggle here on Earth we are connected to our corner stone, our firm foundation we given the strength to run the race, to persevere as living stones through the grace that God pours out for us. We have a beautiful hope for the future. A day with all the saints, all of those who have gone before us in the faith, assured of their foundation that we will our Lord and Savior face to face. A New creation God is building where man and God will dwell together forever. Where the church victorious will be the church in eternal rest.

So welcome to the construction site. God has made you a living stone in His church. He is shaping and forming you and has placed you on a sure foundation. A foundation that not even the gates of hell can prevail over. Our hope is not set on buildings of brick and mortar, our hope is not founded in ourselves and our ability to be a living stone. Our hope is set on the firm foundation of Christ. Until the day we are at rest, may the Lord bless and preserve you in the house he is building. Amen.