

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
May 10, 2020- 4^{5h} Sunday of Easter (A)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Psalm 31; **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...'

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The Church's one foundation.... "The stone that the builder's rejected has become the cornerstone..." ¹ A cornerstone is not just some ceremonial stone laid at the corner of some edifice... it is an indispensable, foundational part of a project, whether a building or something else. Cornerstones are fundamental toward proceeding in any goal, the main support of the whole.

Our God has provided each of us with distinct and specific attributes, gifts, and opportunities. And most of us, at some point in our lives have tried to push away these gifts... to reject them because they seemed unwanted, only to discover that they are the principle and foundational means through which God works in our lives— these may be gifts of friendship, intelligence, beauty, or talent... or more difficult things to accept like personality, sexuality, or handicaps. Think about something foundational in your life, something that at some point you were too embarrassed to embrace, and that you came to understand was foundational to who you are, vital to your being. Also consider what is foundational in the Church and in your spiritual life.

In the field of theology, there is a term "ontology" that refers to the metaphysical concept of "being." Ontology is about God's being, who God is... and it's also about our being and who God created us to be. I believe that being a Christian is all about *becoming*, becoming who "God chose us to be before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1.4). Throughout our human lives we change, like all of the creation, we grow, we develop, we adapt to the world around us. The Church uses the term "ontological change" to describe pivotal times of such growth— specifically, transformative periods in our lives and in our character that are instigated by God. The Sacrament of Baptism is one such experience— a profound experience of inward spiritual grace offered by Christ, seen through the outward symbolic action of the Church. I wonder if our present occurrences also constitute an ontological change?

Many popular theologians and new age Christian writers have been talking about how this time of the COVID 19 pandemic is 'luminal.' Somehow hinting at the obvious, that we are at the threshold of uncertainty; standing on the threshold between what is known to what is

¹ Psalm 118.22, Matthew 21.42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20.17, and Acts 4:11

unknown. However, I would submit that what is happening is so much more ... This crisis that is taking place in all of our lives because of the pandemic is a time of great ontological change, not only for us as individuals but for God's Church, as well. Let me try to explain.

In Greek, there are several words that can be used to express our English term "time," two of them are helpful to consider— *chronos* ('our time' or linear time) and *kairos* ('God's time'). *Chronos*, our time, is what we are used to... it is linear and has a distinct beginning and ending... it is measurable and temporal. *Kairos* or "God's time" comes from above, it is not easy to measure, it's infinite, eternal, without a beginning or an end... it is a time of vulnerability and of heightened opportunity (our English word 'crisis' is related to this Greek word *kairos*). So consider how this crisis brought on by COVID 19 may be a time of opportunity and vulnerability in which God enters our lives, as people and Church. I'm not saying that God caused the COVID 19 illness to occur, what I am saying is that God always has and continues to 'write straight with crooked lines.' God manages to break into our time just when we need God the most! This may be a moment of *kairos*, God's time, indeed I believe it is... a time to reconsider who we are and The Church. A Time to reflect on the one foundation we just sang about, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Church is not about a building, or how many people attend services, or how many people pledge money... its is about Jesus Christ. Jesus, who came to us not to establish an institution, but to share the message of God's love and reconciliation to the whole world! When we were baptized into the Church, we were *changed*, becoming part of the family of God. And now, we are witnessing new change! A wonderful Christian teacher and writer, Max Lucado once said: "God loves you just the way you are, but God refuses to leave you that way." God wants us to be like Jesus, our foundation. Like Jesus, who was willing to suffer, be rejected and isolated, and even die in order to change the world. Like Jesus, "the living stone rejected by mortals yet precious in God's sight."

Alan Roxburgh, whose book we are reading together, blogged ² at the end of last week about how Winston Churchill (the former British Prime Minister during WWII) used to exclaim, "never waste a good crisis!" Maybe we shouldn't waste this pandemic... Maybe we should take this time of crisis and turn it into something extraordinary. This is a time not just about vulnerability, but opportunity.

Let's embrace this time of crisis— of God's *kairos* and presence— and like living stones, allow ourselves to be built anew, with Jesus as our foundation. We can become Jesus' eyes and ears, observing and listening to those around us. We can be Jesus' hands and feet,

² A. J. Roxburgh, "Where are we? What's next?" May 1, 2020:
<http://alanroxburgh.com/2020/05/where-are-we-whats-next/>

reaching out to and carrying those who need us. We can be Jesus' voice, shouting for justice and reassuring a world in fear of God's love, by displaying that love to everyone we meet. Let us be built into that spiritual house that will stand for all eternity and never fall.

In nomine Patris.... †