

Sermon – John 14:1-14; 1 Peter 2:2-10

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Grace Lutheran Church

5 Easter – Year A

14 May 2017

“Living Stones, I Presume”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

1. During the course of our marriage, Erika and I have occupied five homes – and there’s been something wrong with all of them. Oh, plenty of good things about each of them, but in our human longing, we, are at least I, have always managed to find something to complain about. Our first home was the apartment that had been my bachelor pad for the three years prior to our marriage, a charmless little apartment that wouldn’t do for long. Two weeks after we were married, we moved into the congregation’s parsonage, a lovely home that was nearly a century old. It had plenty of charm but had also racked up a century’s worth of problems. When we moved to South Carolina, we spent a few months in a condo that didn’t even have enough room for us to unpack our boxes. Shortly thereafter, we moved into the first home we owned; it was less than a decade old and didn’t have anything wrong with it – except that it lacked the charm of an older home! Fortunately, we now make our home in Oak Park, where all things are perfect, all of the time. We love our house – it has charm! – but we’ve also already had to replace the furnace, install a radon mitigation system, and the back deck is crying out for significant repair work. Oh, the crosses we bear! Truth be told, we have loved every home in which we have lived. They are the places where we came home after being united as husband and wife, the places to which we’ve brought our children home from the hospital. The walls have heard the giggling of our kids, the roofs have provided sanctuaries from the storms of life, and Erika’s mothering love makes it all work. To say we’ve been anything but blessed would be sheer ingratitude. And yet, because we’re human, it’s

inevitable that our hearts yearn for something else, something different. It's hard not to be troubled by whatever the current state of affairs happens to be. If only we could find our way to the perfect house, all would be well, right?

2. So it was for us, and so it was for Thomas, Philip, and all the rest. In today's gospel, they are troubled: troubled by the state of this world in which they make their home. Troubled by the oppression of Rome; troubled by the sin and suffering surrounding them; troubled that this was the sort of place in which the Son of God would soon be put to death for the heinous crimes of preaching forgiveness and teaching love. Troubled that they couldn't find a way out of the underwater mortgage that kept them trapped in cycles of violence and injustice. Troubled by the fact that the floorboards creaked with hunger and the roof leaked thirst; troubled by the sounds of the devil knocking around in the pipes; troubled by their own inability to do anything about it or even believe that God could fix the whole mess. Troubled and confused by Jesus' words of promise, pointing to a heavenly mansion in which there would be room enough for all, the sort of place that had the charm of something old mixed with the certitude of new construction. And finally troubled, I think, by the simple fact that a heavenly home sounds well and good, but what good would it do them now while this house collapsed on their heads?
3. What Thomas and Philip were unable to see, what you and I are so often unable to see, is that God in Christ has undertaken a new sort of construction project. God, you see, isn't all that interested in curb appeal. In fact, God chooses the least likely place to begin building the Kingdom. God chooses Jesus, the least appealing stone of them all, the stone that we have rejected, as the cornerstone upon which to build the whole thing. And then, as Peter writes, God chooses us to be bricks and stones, living stones that God will use to build up the Kingdom.

4. It's safe to say that this is not how we would go about things, starting with a rabbi who eschewed power and strength and then piling us up upon him, one after the other in a Jenga tower that will certainly soon collapse. I mean, look around. We certainly don't seem to add up to much, do we? We are children who can't sit still and adults who wonder if the whole affair is worth the trouble. Our minds wander during the hymns and our fingers dart toward our phones to check Facebook as the preacher drones on. We look around at the people who seem to have it all together, troubled in our hearts that we don't seem to fit in or measure up. What use could God have for us? Well, in ourselves, probably not much. We, however, are not just stones; we are *living stones*, dead but now alive by the grace of Jesus Christ. We don't need to know the way, Thomas, for Jesus himself has become the way, the truth, and the life – for all of us. We don't need to see the Father, Philip, for we have seen him through Jesus, and see him today in bread and wine, body and blood, broken and shed for you. We don't need to wait for the perfect house to come on the market; the home of God is being built for us, *with us*, here and now.
  
5. So first, today, hear and believe that this promise is *for you*. Whatever trouble lives in your heart, Jesus invites you to leave it here today, to let go of what might someday be and to grasp the grace of God making a home with us *right now*. And it that is true for you, it is also true *for them*: for the people who aren't sure why they're here today, or can't get their kids to sit still, as if that matters; for the people who don't have advanced degrees or wouldn't know four-part harmony if J.S. Bach himself tried to teach them; for all those who don't feel like they belong, no matter the reason. *They* belong. Truth be told, they are not *they* any longer; *we* are all *us*. For all of us have been chosen by God, saved by Christ, to become building blocks for the Kingdom. There is no one in this room today who is unnecessary for God's project, no matter what the world has told them along the way. They have been called and chosen by

God – we have been called and chosen by God – and who are we to disagree with God’s plans, no matter how ludicrous it all seems? As long as a single stone is missing, we are less than God desires. May we remember this as we discover community in this place, for we are called to be together in Christ, and this call empowers and inspires us to not simply make room for people in our pews, but at Grace and in the Body of Christ itself.

6. Together, we bear the promise of Christ to do great work by his power, for we are called not to simply wait for a far-off heavenly home but to work even as we wait, that this earth would become more like it is in heaven. It is as church, as community, that we are called to stand against oppression and injustice, to work to alleviate hunger and homelessness, to care for our creation and our neighbor. And it is here that Jesus heals our troubled hearts that we might do this work. After all, building the Kingdom isn’t up to us. In his death and resurrection Jesus has accomplished everything needful; in baptism the promise is secure. Our job is simply to be stones, *living* stones in the hands of the master builder. You might not feel like much, and we may not look like much. But you are forgiven; you are free; you are alive in Christ. You don’t even need to know the way; Jesus will get you there. Gathered together in grace, built up together in love; well, that sounds like a pretty good, even charming, place to call home. Amen.

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