**Easter 5A - 1 Peter 2:2-10 7/5/23**

**Sermon Video link:** [**https://youtu.be/ZIt5AyAzYlY**](https://youtu.be/ZIt5AyAzYlY)

Back in 2006 I was preparing for the 140th anniversary of St David’s Freshwater Creek just south of Geelong, Vic.. During my preparation I came across a photo of the church online in the State Library of Victoria digital library. The title of the photograph was “Abandoned Church.” I know that there are plenty of abandoned churches in Australia. In some places they are being used for other purposes and in other places they are falling down. There is a real sadness about a church that has been abandoned. A place that once was used to worship God, suddenly being left empty and desolate. No one wants to think that their church would ever be abandoned.

A few years before I arrived in that parish there had been attempts to close that little church at Freshwater Creek, but about a dozen determined members kept the place open. It was in a growing area, and by the time I left they were regularly having over 20 people attending the monthly service. I checked this week and seventeen years later they are still having monthly worship services.

For many people the word “church” brings to mind a building where people gather to worship God. Sometimes congregations become very tied to their church building. It is understandable because often attached to the building are many important memories and experiences. The building can remind people of the work and effort that went into establishing the congregation, raising funds for the building and often their own or other member’s hard labour put into the building project.

For other people the church building relates to important events in their own lives. They may remember attending as children, being confirmed, getting married, having a child baptised, and having the funeral of a loved one. All these things can result in very strong emotional attachments to church buildings.

In the New Testament the church is never thought of as a physical building. Before Jesus arrived on the scene, there was a building that was considered to be God’s chosen earthly residence. It was the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus made it very clear that with the Son of God now having come down from heaven there is a new holy temple and that is Christ’s body. Through Baptism we are all joined to Christ and the apostle Paul tells us that the church itself is the body of Christ with Christ being the head.

Today we hear Peter using another metaphor which also reminds us that the church is not a physical building. Peter calls the church a spiritual house with each of us who have been Baptised into Christ being living stones and Jesus being the cornerstone.

In ancient buildings the cornerstone was a stone that was perfectly square which was placed in the corner to ensure that the walls were also square. Christ as our cornerstone is the template for the church and all those who are part of the church. Jesus is the one who determines the character of the church and the character of all its members. We in turn are the living stones in Christ’s church. Each of us living stones rely on the cornerstone, growing in salvation and becoming more like Christ. As we do so we get rid of malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander. At the same time, like all living things we grow and begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience and so on.

Like the stones in any building our strength comes from the cornerstone who makes the walls straight and true. Our strength also comes from each other. In the same way that stones in a wall all support each other and make the whole wall strong, we too in God’s spiritual house support each other and make the whole building strong. If some stones are weak and in danger of crumbling the other stones provide support as God repairs and strengthens the weaker stones. For this to happen, all of us, both those who are strong and those who are weak and crumbling, need sustenance and strength.

For sustenance and strength, we seek and long for the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word. Like babies instinctively seek the comfort and strength that comes from their mother’s milk, we also, prompted by the Spirit, seek comfort and strength from God’s Word. By the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word and through the body and blood of Christ we are healed, we grow and we mature and become more and more like Jesus the cornerstone.

This Word includes the accounts of God’s mighty acts recorded in the Old Testament and especially God’s might act of salvation for the world in and through the life, death and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. In this way God, through Word and Spirit strengthens each stone in God’s spiritual house, and at the same time builds up the whole spiritual house, and therefore the whole church, into a spiritual house that can weather all storms.

In 1997 I spent a year of my pastoral training as a vicar in Melbourne. I remember one day meeting someone from another denomination. When I told him I was training to become a pastor he said, “So you will be the prayer in your church.” Upon asking him what he meant, it appeared that he had the impression that the only people who could have direct access to God are pastors or priests, and their job was to pray on behalf of the non-ordained members.

Today we hear Peter telling us that as members of Christ’s church we not only living stones, we are also collectively a holy priesthood. That means we are all royal priests, and we all have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. It also means that all of us who are part of God’s spiritual house through Christ can pray on behalf of ourselves, each other, and the world.

Prayer is not the only thing we are called to do as royal priests. We are also called to proclaim the mighty acts of God that are first revealed to us through God’s Word. Prayer and proclamation, these are our spiritual sacrifices as royal priests.

The buildings and locations we worship in are not the church. Their function is to serve the needs of God’s spiritual house and not the other way around. The truly precious things about all the world’s church buildings are the royal priests who worship inside them and the Holy God who is there among us whenever two or three gather in his name. What is most important is not the physical building but the spiritual house that uses the building. The house that has been built by God out of the living stones that are his chosen people, the royal priests who make the sacrifices of prayer and proclamation in order that all may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing they may have life in his name.

Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz