

**Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.”

<sup>7</sup> 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,” <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Living Stones,**

This has been a strange time for Pastors and for church members, especially when it comes to our spiritual lives. We like to gather together on Sunday mornings in our church building for worship and for fellowship and I would guess that we get some of our identity from the church and more specifically from our church building.

When someone asks where we go to church we are glad to tell them we are members at Beautiful Savior on the south side of town, just past Calvary Cemetery. But right now, we are in strange times because we have to gather electronically and it just isn’t the same as being here in person with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s almost like part of our identity has been taken away along with part of our weekly routine.

But our amazing God, who always knows what we need and need to hear, speaks to us through Peter’s words this morning to remind us that our identity is about more than a physical building located on the south side of Austin because, **“We are More than a Physical Building.”** No matter where we are, **“We are Living Stones and Part of a Spiritual House Resting on the Cornerstone of Christ,”** and God even calls us **“His Chosen People.”**

**I.** In today’s construction practices, cornerstones are often symbolic. They serve no practical purpose when it comes to the structure itself but in ancient times, the cornerstone was an essential part of the building process. It determined the placement and lines of every other building block and in some buildings it was used to join two walls at the main corner of the building. If the cornerstone was placed incorrectly or if it was substandard in some way, the whole building would be off and might even crumble in the future.

As Peter encourages us today he quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, **“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.”** Here the Promised Messiah – Jesus – is described as a chosen and precious

cornerstone. Even before the beginning of time, God chose his Son to be the foundation of the Holy Christian Church. And Jesus is precious. He is precious to God the Father and to us.

That is why Peter describes Jesus as, **“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.”** We don’t often think of stones as being alive but Peter describes Christ in this way and he describes all believers as living stones as well because the Holy Christian Church is not a visible building. It is not a physical structure but rather the Holy Christian Church is made up of all believers resting our faith on the cornerstone of the church – Jesus our Lord and Savior. We are alive because of Christ and we are alive because Christ dwells in us through faith.

Right in the middle of this section Peter paints a contrasting picture between believer and unbeliever – those who are living stones and those who have hearts of stone, **“<sup>7</sup> 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,”<sup>8</sup> and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”** What makes Christ precious to the believer causes the unbeliever to stumble and fall.

We look to the cross and see how much our Savior loves us by suffering and paying for our sins while the unbeliever sees the cross as a sign of defeat and weakness. We see the resurrection of Jesus as a sign that our sins have been paid for and our salvation is complete while the unbeliever rejects the resurrection and the comfort it brings. This precious, living stone we call Jesus causes unbelievers to stumble and fall into everlasting destruction while it gives the believer strength to declare the praises of our wonderful Savior. Peter tells us that we can do this because, **“[We] 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.”**

**II.** When we think of God’s “chosen people,” we might think of the Children of Israel. They certainly were God’s chosen people during the Old Testament times. But once Christ came into this world and fulfilled his Father’s requirement of perfection for us and then was the perfect sacrifice for our sins, that changed everything. Jesus came for all people – Jew and Gentile alike. He paid for the sins of all people and this good news – this gospel message – is to be proclaimed to all people. We have been chosen by God because we have been given the gift of faith and that brings us into God’s family.

It also brings us into the priesthood of all believers. We have access to God through Jesus our great high priest. He offered himself as the perfect sin sacrifice and now intercedes for all believers in heaven.

Peter also calls us a “holy nation.” We are holy because we have been forgiven. We are holy because we are part of the Holy Christian Church – by faith we are one of the living stones. And we are a people belonging to God because Jesus redeemed us with his holy precious blood. He called us out of the darkness of unbelief into his glorious light of salvation. He did this because

of his great mercy and love. He did this so that we can praise him and declare all that he has done.

So how do we praise him and declare all that he has done? We can do that by telling others about Jesus and his great love for us. We can do that by showing Christian love, especially during these trying times: maybe sewing masks for those that don't have that skill or running errands for someone who is at a higher risk or calling friends that might be lonely and need some encouragement and of course by praying.

Praying for your friends and relatives and also for your government leaders and for our health care workers and all those who are helping others to get through these times like EMTs and the police and firefighters and teachers. And pray for families with children. The list is almost endless – there are so many ways we can serve God and our fellow man and thus declare the praises of him who has saved us through our thoughts, words and deeds.

We are living in some strange times and there are many things we miss including gathering at church for worship. But this pandemic has shown us that God's Word and God's people are so much more than a church building. So take heart. You are a living stone and part of the Holy Christian Church because of your faith in Jesus. You are one of God's chosen people and part of God's family of believers. Praise and thank God every day and rely on him to continue to be your strength and comfort. Amen.