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Living Stones I Peter 2:1-13

We are living stones.

When we come to Jesus,
when we decide to follow of Jesus,
we become living stones.

You are a living stone. What a strange picture.
I'm sure some of you are wondering
if it's a compliment or a put down.

We all know that a swimming fish in the Ocean is living.

We can understand a mushroom growing
on a dead tree stump as living.

A tree full of blossoms is living.

Even a turtle napping on a sunny log is living.

But a stone? It doesn't move or breathe.

How can a stone be living?

What does the bible mean by living stones?

Are there dead stones? How is Jesus a living stone?

How are we living stones?

To us, today, all stones seem dead.

To find out the meaning of living stones
we need to travel to other cultures. To Africa.

Deep in the bush there,
we meet a tribe who use the term living stones
in their everyday speaking.

We meet a family there, in Africa,
sitting around a fire cooking their meal.

We join them, in our imagination, and after a while
of sitting around the fire we ask them,

"What do you mean by living stones?"

To answer the question an old woman motions us to follow her.

She leads us outside the village to a nearby stream.

Many stones of various sizes and shapes lie on the banks and
in the water.

She points to certain of these stones, and says to us
"Pick these up and carry them back to the village.

They are living stones."

Puzzled we carry back our load of living stones.

The woman tells us to put them down in
an open space in the village.

Seeing our questioning looks as we lay down the stones,
 the woman smiles and says, "These are living stones.
 They are living stones because they are part of life- our life.
 These here are for building a circle around the fire.
 Some of them are flat topped and
 we can set our cooking pots on them.
 These here are for grinding grain.
 On the large flat ones we lay the grain, and
 those smaller ones we hold in our hand and use to
 crush the grain."

Ah, we say. Then not all stones are living?
 Only the ones that can be moved and used in important ways?"
 The old woman nods.
 Living stones come in many shapes and sizes.
 Some are used with slings to kill small animals for food.
 Some are used for building.
 Others are used for decoration.
 Still others are used for cutting.
 But dead stones cannot be moved or used.
 To us not all stones are as dead as we thought they were.
 Let's travel to an other culture for a moment.
 To the Middle East.
 There we drive along a country road
 through a hilly region in Judea.
 As we drive along the rolling landscape our guide
 tells us to notice something.
 "These hills", he points out, are filled with stones.
 But notice how many have been dug up and built into terraces
 for the vineyards and gardens.
 Others have been made into low walls to mark the
 boundaries of the properties.
 Most of the houses here are also made of the stones.
 The walls of these houses are held together by cornerstones at
 the top and the bottom.
 These cornerstones shape and measure the buildings
 by the way they are placed.
 They must be a certain kind of stone,
 cut to just the right size and shape.
 They are carefully chosen by the builder,
 for they are the most important stones in the building.
 Only a skilled and experienced builder who is keenly observant
 can tell which stones are best to use as cornerstones.

In the bible this picture of a cornerstone is used several times.

In psalm 118 the nations of the world are compared to stones.

God is seen as the master builder,

God is building the house of salvation.

As God the experienced builder looks around the world he
picks of all the stones; Israel as the cornerstone.

Israel is believed to be that important stone that keeps the
kingdom of God in place.

In the gospels this cornerstone honor is given to Jesus.

Even though the leaders of Israel rejected Jesus,

God has chosen Jesus to be the cornerstone.

Jesus has the most important place in
the vineyard of God's kingdom.

Jesus was the true Israel,

the only one who could fulfill Israel's task in God's plan.

And Peter in his letter calls Jesus the living stone.

He is that precious chosen cornerstone in

the house of God's salvation. He holds the house together.

Putting all these things together

gives us a better understanding of who we are as Living stones.

We are like Jesus.

We are stones like him, only he is the cornerstone.

Jesus is called the living stone because

God uses him for the life of the whole world.

As God is creating the house of the new heaven and the new
earth Jesus is the Living stone.

He is the foundation on which the people of God are built.

He is the source of peace and love and justice and compassion. He is the measure of all things in
this kingdom.

Jesus, as the Living cornerstone,

holds all the people of God together.

Although we as God's people come in all shapes and
sizes and colors, in Jesus our differences work
together to form one building.

If it were not for Jesus who is the living cornerstone
the church would have fallen apart long ago.

But in Jesus we are united into one people.

Jesus as the living cornerstone shapes our lives.

Though we interpret his words in various ways, and
often fail to live by them,

his life and his teachings are still the foundation of our existence.
 He defines who we are and
 where we are going, and what we do.

But there are many who reject Jesus as the living cornerstone.
 For them Jesus is someone whom they stumble over.
 He is the rock on which they get hurt.
 People who reject the living Stone fail to trust Jesus and
 do not regard his teachings seriously for living.
 What Jesus said about forgiving, about our enemies,
 about money, about worrying and about judging others are
 nice teaching to learn about.
 But it doesn't make sense to them to actually apply them in
 their day to day living.

Those who reject Jesus and his direction for their lives
 hurt themselves.
 And so often we too stumble and fall against the living stone.
 When we refuse to forgive after the 7th time
 we suffer broken relationships and broken hearts.
 When we ignore Jesus command to love our enemies,
 we end up waging war with those
 we dislike and disagree with.
 When we dismiss Jesus teachings about money, and
 hang onto it for dear life, and trust in it,
 we are overcome with anxiety and depression when
 the recession hits us or unemployment threatens.
 When we let our worries get the best of us rather
 than trust in God,
 when we stubbornly refuse to let go and let God,
 we tie ourselves in knots and suffer from ulcers and
 cancers and all kinds of other ills.
 When we turn our critical eye towards our neighbors,
 even in the church, and throw the stones of judgment at
 their errors,
 we end up as broken communities and our relationships
 in the church become so shallow and unsatisfying.
 When we do not believe Jesus and take him at his word,
 he becomes the stone that makes us stumble and fall.

But when we come to Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit
 we can regard Jesus, and the way of Jesus as precious.
 By the gracious work of the spirit,
 as a flower unfolds before the sun

we can open ourselves and come to the living loving stone,
 the cornerstone of our lives and the life of the world.
 To come to this living stone means to trust Jesus
 so completely that we build our lives on his word and
 on his teachings.
 It means that we will throw ourselves confidently on his
 mercy when we fail.

When we come to the Living stone,
 when we open ourselves to Jesus,
 when we desire to have his spirit, his heart, his passion
 we become living stones too.
 We become precious to God, because God, the master builder,
 can pick us up, and move us, and use us
 for the building of his kingdom in our time,
 in our family, in our community, in our world.

As living stones we are connected to THE living stone.
 We are part of a building that he holds together.
 There is no such thing as being a Christian in isolation.
 We need to be part of each other's life,
 deeply connected to each other,
 just as we are connected to Jesus the cornerstone.
 We need to be connected together as living stones,
 movable and useful to each other,
 if we are to function as part of the spiritual house
 God is building.
 The word of God, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and
 Loving and caring for each other,
 all these bind us together into God's holy building.

And we as God's building.
 We are living stones being built into a spiritual house
 a holy priesthood, a royal family,
 a people belong to God.

What about you. Do you want to be a living stone?
 Do you want to be chosen by God and picked up as a
 precious person to be moved and used in his house hold?