

Resurrection Living (3): 1 Peter 2:4-12 (John 17:20-26) 'A Chosen People'

Where's your favourite place in the world? Hard question to answer – maybe home, maybe some exotic place from a spectacular holiday, maybe a place where something special happened.

I would be hard pushed to give you my one all-time favourite place, but certainly up in the top 5 would be the **City of Florence**. Many of you will know I studied Renaissance Art, and as part of my studies first visited Florence in 1992 (and family 2011 SLIDE). It is a breathtaking city, full of so many wonderful treasures. Walk down one street and discover the small chapel with Leonardo's Last Supper. Walk into the main square and be confronted by Michelangelo's David, 18 ft high, standing guard over the city (S). From the statue of David, you can walk on round the corner to the Uffizi Gallery (S), full of unimaginable and priceless treasures. Or turn and face the opposite way and see the iconic dome of the cathedral (S), a miracle at the time of 15th century engineering.

Walk on past the Duomo and down a few sidestreets and you will eventually find a less well known Museum, the Accademia (S). In here you will find the original David (outside one is a copy). Turn the corner in the museum and you will find these (SLIDE). Carved by Michelangelo, known as the '4 slaves', and probably my favourite sculptures of all time. Michelangelo was once asked how he created his wonders, and he said that inside each block of stone there was a person. All he had to do was to chip away the excess and reveal what was already there. And here it is. **Living stones** – each one a person, revealing themselves from the block of marble. Only Michelangelo left them unfinished, almost to show them in the midst of creation, trying to set themselves free. Almost more beautiful than finished works aren't they? Living stones, in the process of creation.

Perhaps you can relate to one of these images (won't ask which!). But the idea of living stones is our key phrase for today, isn't it? This is how our passage begins: READ v4-5. Peter calls Jesus the living stone in v4 and says we are to be like him in v5 – 'like living stones....' What does he mean? That's our key task for today. **Look at these 2 phrases: 'the living stone' and 'like living stones'**.

So firstly: Jesus 'the living stone'. Particularly special phrase for Peter – his name given by Jesus and what does it mean? (ASK) 'Rock.' Jesus says to Peter in Matthew 16 – this is your name, and on this 'rock' I will build my church. But Peter recognises his authority rests on one much greater – he points us to *The Rock, The living stone, Jesus himself*.

But why this image? Long history in OT, a long connection with God. Back in Exodus God meets Moses directly on that great slab of rock called Mount Sinai. A few chapters later, God provided for his people by bringing water from a rock (wonder if Peter also had this image in mind when he thought about Jesus, and called him the living stone – *the stone that brings life*). King David was first to use the name for God directly, in his song of praise in 2 Samuel 22 (S) 'the Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.' Became a common phrase in Psalms – God as a rock. Why? A big rock is secure and immovable – something immense, powerful, something which protects us, something we can trust. So the idea of God as our rock was born.

And when Isaiah prophesies about the greater one to come, he uses this idea again, which Peter himself quotes in v6: READ. Christ is our cornerstone (S) – the one on which everything rests.

Somewhere in this church there'll be a cornerstone (anyone know where?) – the single most important stone in the building, the one from which everything else is built. Not necessarily the biggest, but most important. 'Build your house on the rock,' Jesus says in his famous parable – and as Peter tells us, Jesus is that rock.

But he takes the image further, doesn't he? He adds a word. This rock is not just an inert block of marble. It is a *living* stone. Something more dynamic, and also more unsettling. Lots of adventure films about what happens when inert things come to life. (Watched one yesterday – Goosebumps – stories come to life. Think of others – anyone remember statue of Talos in Jason and the Argonauts?) Imagine how much more powerful to an ancient audience – if strongest material (stone) was to get up and move...?

Also biblical precedent. Think of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of statue in Daniel (S) and then 'stone cut without hands' smashes it down, and rises to become a mountain and fills the whole earth. This is a picture of kingdom of God coming with Jesus. The stone cut without hands. The divine stone, the living stone.

And not a stone to be messed with. The enormity of a cornerstone brings us comfort and security – but as Jesus reminds his disciples in Matthew 21 quoting the same verse about the cornerstone in Peter, you don't mess with it: 'Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.'

This great stone is alive! – and we have come to him, and know him now to be our Rock, our fortress and our saviour.

But the image doesn't stay there, does it? **It's not only Christ who is the living stone (S): READ v5.** Now we see the image in more detail don't we. What is Christ the cornerstone of? God's people. Here the image sharpens to reveal the temple, the place where God dwells among his people. Only it's not the temple in Jerusalem anymore. We are the temple now. God dwells among us as his community – hence we are called 'the body of Christ' – and God dwells in us individually by his Spirit. So we too become living stones.

Often when clubs and organisations want to redevelop, they ask people to buy bricks – maybe one or two of you have one in the Don's stadium (or King Power) (S – [Norwich City, Lou](#)). It's like you're that brick, part of structure. Well, that's the image here, isn't it? We're all part of that structure now, being built into the people God calls us to be. Which means *we need the cornerstone. And we need each other* – look at any wall. Every stone supports the others around it.

But that's not main thrust for today – passage pulls out other applications. What does it mean for us to be living stones, like Jesus? (S) Let's look at some of phrases.

'Chosen by God' – READ v4b. *Never forget that before you chose God, God chose you.* He thinks you're special, he didn't make anyone else like you. What you do matters to him. But even more, who you are matters to him. He needs you in his wall, his temple.

'Rejected by humans' READ v4a – this is the hard bit, isn't it? Not everyone will like us. We march to the beat of a different drum. *Friends, we have to learn to live with the fact that some people will think us odd, or worse.* It's why having that deep conviction that you're special to God is so important. We have to learn to find our security in Christ and not in others. 'You are what the most important person in your life thinks you are.' If that's God, then you can withstand anything. Why School of Freedom (S). What would it look like to really grasp your identity in Christ, to be defined by that and not the bad stuff you pick up along the way?

'Beacons of light' – READ v9b and then v12. OK this exact phrase not in passage, but v12 sounds very much like Jesus words about light in Matthew 5. 'So that people may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' (Aside: authenticity – Peter remembering words of his master and friend). As Peter talks earlier about rejection in v4, living good lives doesn't mean people won't sometimes accuse us wrongly, or perhaps question our motives.

Amazing thing about human nature how we are jealous of those who are good. Starts even in school, we learn not to like goody two-shoes. Or maybe people who've never experienced true love will always assume that our love comes with strings attached. But if our consciences are clear before God, we don't need to worry. Important that we do live lives of integrity – but if we do, then encouragement is that in the end our transparently good lives will change the lives of others. Even some of our opponents will praise God by the end of their lives. I had a long chat on the phone a few months ago with a chap I knew at college called Toby Crowe. TELL STORY.

Royal priests (S) – READ v5a and then v9a. Looking around you at church this morning, who's the priest? You all are! Why I don't like to use the name priest – gives impression that I'm the only one. Now I am, but then you are too. In fact you're more than priests, you're royal priests. You bear the authority of the king. TELL STORY OF BOB 'royal priest'.

What does a priest do? A go-between – represents God to people and people to God. But not you lot in here. We're priests for that lot out there. *We represent them to God* – i.e. we pray for them we ask God to be in their lives. And *we represent God to them*: we love them, we help them, and we share our faith: READ v9b.

Want to do the work of a royal priest – then join us this afternoon for our Prayer Walk. What better way to start? And if you're not sure about it, why not give it a try – what's the worst that could happen? And for those who can't manage a long walk anymore, great news is that we can pray for our community at home, in our chairs.

As I close, let's go back to those sculptures (S). If Christ is the true living stone, we're all a bit like this – on the way to being what we were meant to be. But not there yet. Like living stones... like living stones. What is God's word to you today?

Chosen by God / Rejected by humans / Beacons of light / Royal priests. **What is God chiselling in you?** What will that mean for you? God gives us free will – we can say yes or no. Let's take a moment to say yes to God today.... and for grace to stick with that decision. SILENCE/PRAYER.