

*“Resist and Begin Again...A Blessed  
New Normal”*

*“Rock Solid Faith...Pebbles And All”*

1 Peter 2:1-10, Acts 7:51 - 8:1,  
later...John 14:1-14 told anew!

May 10, 2020  
Fifth Week of Eastertide

Ahead of readings share:

Both of wisdom teachings use the image  
of stones...

In Peter we are invited to be as  
living stones...

the living dwelling place of  
God, cornerstones.  
A life giving image.

In Acts, stones are thrown, killing  
stones. Life stopping.

In Acts, Stephen, considered the first  
Christian martyr and first Deacon of the  
church, is killed off, stoned,

because he names what he sees  
happening, speaks truth to power  
challenging the community in-fighting  
rather than their doing ministry.

Peter’s vision is church near its best,  
Acts is our shadow side revealed.

As we listen, remember that in that time  
when heart is referenced,  
it doesn’t refer to the emotions.

But rather to an inner space where we  
put our thoughts into our feelings to  
reveal a deeper wisdom...  
which includes feeling and experience  
and knowledge and intuition and  
prayerfulness.

Ahead of Peter: Remember that the  
writer of Peter is addressing a newly  
forming group of folks...some Jewish,  
some gentile, some alien and so calling  
them God’s own people does not imply  
their being a club but their coming  
together, a new belonging. In this way  
they are chosen...self-chosen – choosing  
God really, willing to face suffering in  
following the just ways of living Jesus  
portrays.

Prompting:

If we had even the most fleeting notion  
that discipleship would be easy,  
comfortable, or safe,

we need only read our scripture in Acts  
to know differently...**or**...just

look at how we are called to pivot our  
just.good.food gardens, DI, ASLC during  
this challenging time,

**or**

Realize the challenge and yet impact of  
our/your commitment to being in  
worship weekly Sunday and/or Monday  
and/or Wednesday...on Zoom,

**or**

Look at our call to creatively provide  
compassionate care to our members and  
friends let alone our call to lead other  
local faith communities in service...*us!*

Easy? No. But...

We are all called as Christians to  
participate – to serve the needs of those  
around us...often

starting with our mental-emotional well-  
being that keeps us from being free to  
address community needs.

We are called to actively, confidently (with oneness) pursue just housing, education, employment for our *own* families...yes, but *more so* for the greater community.

Gee, not easy to be a disciple.

It's not easy for anyone. Not easy for the church to witness in the world and take care of the building, create nurturing programs, pay staff.

And sometimes discipleship may mean...martyrdom...

as you speak the hard truth and do the hardest thing!

But know: The word "martyr" in its original form means "witness".

The fact that we link the word "martyr" with being in harm's way and even death,

tells us exactly how dangerous witnessing was...  
and still can be.

When we live from our faith and witness to the world,  
others may want to

stone us, "kill us off"...silence us, shut us down.

And conversely...when we are silent about injustice,

others may also want to stone us for not witnessing!

Hmmnnn...which one the deadlier sin?

The context for the people's anger toward Stephen was his speech before the Council.

The prophetic voice is rarely well received by those who are comfortable right where they are

or who benefit from the status quo,

or are caught up in power plays, personalities,  
self-aggrandizement...

who live in the scarcity model vs the model of abundance.

The prophetic voice rarely well received by those whose attention is "directed in" rather than "living out".

The martyrdom/witness of Stephen is a turning point

For the church to "live out" its call.

Here's what happened:

From the beginning, the rapidly growing Jewish Christian church movement cared for its poor, including its widows and orphans as well as poor gentiles, through

a daily distribution of food and other goods.

We heard about that in last week's wisdom teaching.

But then there is a split between the Jerusalem Jewish Christians and the Palestinian Jewish Christians that led to Gentile widows being neglected in the distribution.

Imagine, a split in the church! OMG!

When the widows began to complain, “the disciples,” saw the need to face the situation squarely. Confront it!  
Living out their witness.

They elected some who were deemed wise to ensure the distribution was fair to all.  
...the first deacons of the church.

Stephen is one of these and immediately became embroiled in the debate concerning new faith Jews and long standing ones. Long-timers vs new-comers...

And Stephen understood Jesus’ message as a direct challenge to those who wanted to do less for the poor outside the church *and even* within the church...  
who’s in...who’s out...where our focus is and isn’t!

Today...for example, the church may

pay more attention to the *color* of the carpeting than to the discrimination faced by *people of color*.

Or...Hang on to income/endowment to perpetuate its building rather than use it to create change in real lives. Safety over risk.

Risk. Stephen’s insights, his prophetic voice, got him killed.

And Saul was there as the throng stoned Stephen...Saul, the very one God later calls to serve boldly,  
known to us in the scriptures as Paul. Interesting, huh?

I guess we should never give up on anyone!

Never think you know what’s possible for anyone.

And not hold onto grudges or opinions too long!

Hhhmmnnnn...this is not a once-upon-a-time story

about a few immature people in some other era  
whose behavior we can dismiss with smugness

thinking we would never do that...what? Us...throw stones?

Oh this story...

This is about us, about every single church and each one of us when we stick our fingers in our ears rather than hear about an uncomfortable reality in our church, the Church, the community...

and we throw stones vs. engage for change!

This is about us when we attack the messenger or ignore a complicated subject to avoid admitting our own culpability or the real issue at hand.

Karen in Circle said, “like avoiding the truth of how easy it is for me to stay home cause I can do so comfortably not appreciating how hard it would be for someone unemployed to stay home facing such hardship.

We throw stones.

We get so defensive when someone goes on the offense.  
When truth is told to power.

The church can get defensive...about the long timers vs. the new comers...like in Stephen’s time. For example,

the church often prays for new folk to come, and then when they do, doesn’t really want to hear what they have to say.

It’s not easy to integrate these new folk and new ideas and ministry into the flow of usual ministry...because it would often change everything.

Long timers would have to share their power and let’s face it...we were here first and have been working hard.

We may have lost our way, but darn it...you newbies...have to earn yours...your stripes!

Gatekeeping instead of gate opening!

Opening our hearts and minds to invite in new folks and care for others can be hard work. And, it’s worth it!

Point is: Friends, we, too, often throw stones.

Trying to hang on to the delusion of the past being better than the present, finding it hard

to balance taking care of ourselves with taking care of others...ie. DI vs property needs, salaries vs fellowship!

The church...we, struggle with new ways, new folks, new ministry, new needs.

It's a constant process of seeing, opening, coming down off that cross and starting again.

And when we won't or don't...let's be clear...

We throw stones choosing to be shaped by fear  
rather than love,  
live in illusion rather than truth,  
blame others rather than look to our own responsibilities.

Sometimes boulders of guilt hold us down when we could be walking around with pebbles of insight...in our pocket, shoe.  
(Thanks Patti for that wisdom this week.)

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Few of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century anticipate our Christian witness will involve death.

But many of those outside the church (and a few within it who are paying attention) ...are coming to realize:

Christianity sure appears to be dead...

has been driven to the margins of society because it doesn't seem to stand for enough,  
witness to much!  
Isn't willing to martyr for anything.

*Once I heard this: The Church may be the least Christian institution in the world...  
because it isn't willing to die for what it believes...  
die to the old to allow something new to live,  
bankrupt itself to do the "right" things!*

Because of centuries "talking" the faith rather than "walking" the faith,  
the Church can no longer expect to be listened to  
with tacit understanding or respect,  
be seen as true leaders of justice. You know this.

And complicating things, because  
the church has been silent too long,  
if now a disciple within dares to challenge us work for justice and ask for help doing it  
...she or he is often met with skepticism (banished to problem solving and committee  
work before they can begin) or to disdain if not outright hostility  
(even in their own church)!

...and the stones shout!

The derision and silence within the church itself  
pushes others not to take our message  
to heart and hope...  
broken, chipped hearts that want to open to hope.

**And still there is assurance that we *can* witness,**  
***can* move faithfully and confidently...**  
**moving from where we are to what we can be...**  
**as we pivot our lives and our ministry and become**  
**living cornerstones!**

Today's wisdom teachings take us from stones flung in anger and denial to being living stones...

building our lives on the rock of our faith...  
healing ourselves, filling on spiritual milk, and  
saving ourselves from our lesser selves.

Chosen for the hard work of ministry...living stones are built into spiritual houses where all can dwell.

You know, if we extracted all the water in the human body we would be left largely with minerals and trace elements...stones.

So we are in a very literal sense living stones...  
connected to each other and all of creation.  
Water added to help us flow...move...reform ourselves!

Living stones...an odd way to think of ourselves.  
And what a challenge!

**So think about it.**  
**Are you...**

~a stone thrown out of anger;

~a stone in the rock walls of a fortress built to keep others out, to protect those inside who perceive danger...real, imagined, or projected danger and anger;

~a stumbling stone, self-righteously blocking the path of another?

Listen, if you've stumbled carrying a boulder of guilt or fear...if you have gone astray or been ousted...there's a way to tumble back to grace, to gather pebbles of insight and build again.

To embrace your being a walking, talking temple,  
a spiritual house inviting all God's people: Come inside!

Willing to go to them vs waiting for them  
to come to you.

**All disparate, unique stones...we can choose to be  
living stones...chosen to be in solidarity  
with each other to build up a new dwelling place, the new kingdom, a  
new humanity.**

Friends,  
we are indeed ALL chosen...Question is:

Chosen for what purpose? What will you chose?

Here, we are striving as faith community to be a sanctuary space for each of us to try on  
being that new human being Jesus invites us to become (living stones)

...failing miserably sometimes and yet willing to start again as we stay alongside each  
other...saving ourselves, offering salvation to others. Chosen for this!

Gathering can transform us on any given Sunday or Monday  
or Wednesday, change all of us each week  
degree by degree...that's biblical!

Let us take time to ask ...

~What is the rock upon which I currently stand my life? (*Really...everyone else can  
see it...do you?*)

~What rock from the past am I still holding? Cause I'm afraid or blamed or shamed or  
confused or full of myself! *You can put it down!*

~What rock am I throwing...out of anger...angry for really good reasons but hurting  
myself as much or more than anyone else? *You can...stop!*

Claim it: We are a spiritual house built of living stones  
and Jesus is the cornerstone.

Nothing but a pile of stones until we come together as a temple of peacemaking and  
non-violence and justice for all...

God's house...whose house? God's house!

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In my Father's house there are many rooms...room for all...it's not all about me, or you!  
If it were not so, I would say so!

And where is this house?  
You know the way! Jesus goes on:

I am the Way...live in my Ways of truth, and light, and life.

Face the Easter truth and “start again” with each other...  
with open-broken chipped hearts!

We are all one...spiritual house built of living stones.

Easter invites us to breathe and think and start again!

We are the new humanity.

We are one holy temple spread across the whole of our community as a new foundation  
for a blessed new normal.