

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday After Easter, April 28, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 466, 467:3, 460:1-3, 465, 473:1.

Lessons: Isaiah 28:16-22, Ephesians 2:11-22, Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think every one of us wants to be part of something. We don't like to go through life completely alone. From time to time we hear news reports stating that many Americans have experienced loneliness and that it is not good for their health. We especially want to be part of something nice, something pleasant, something special and hope that it will lead to something good.

Today the Word of God tells you who believe that

**YOU ARE LIVING STONES, BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE**

1. ***“Living stones”?* How can that be?**
2. **God gives life to spiritually dead sinners, so that you may serve God.**

Living stones? Isn't that a contradiction? Stones are dead and we even use the figure of speech “stone-dead.” But that is what Holy Scripture says you who believe are. The Word of God pictures us as ***“a spiritual house,”*** the Lord's temple, and then talks about priests serving in this temple. This is a special priesthood, especially when we remember what we once were before Christ came into our hearts.

Our text speaks of Jesus as ***“the living Stone”***. ***“Living”*** describes this stone as one that is full of life and has all the power of life. This stone is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter makes reference to Old Testament passages which describe Christ as ***“the living stone.”***

He did not say that Christians are like living stones but he says that they are living stones, as strange as this may sound. And as living stones, we are being built into something, ***“into a spiritual house”***. We are not doing the building. Here again we see that we do not decide to come to Christ. We have been made part of this house through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that the Apostle Peter addressed this letter ***“To God's elect, strangers in the world, ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”*** (1 Peter 1:1-2, NIV84)

And now he says that as you come to Jesus Christ, you are no longer a lifeless rock but you are a stone that has been made alive. How can that be? Although you were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, you have been made alive by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

You are special because you who believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior are part of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

When we confess our faith in the words of the Apostolic Creed, we confess that we believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. That shows that the Holy Ghost has made you a part of something important, something lasting, something enduring eternally. You are part of a spiritual house. And you have a special calling to be a priest who serves God because of what Jesus Christ did for you and to you.

When these living stones are combined, the result is **“a spiritual house,” “the church of the living God”** (1 Timothy 3:15, NIV84) as Paul writes to Timothy. This is the result of our coming to Christ through the work of the Holy Ghost.

And, lest you forget, or in case you have forgotten, he tells you about that spiritual house and its foundation. He starts with its foundation, Jesus Christ, who is the very cornerstone on which this house of living stones is built.

On earth, we worship in buildings made of wood. We know that wooden buildings can easily be destroyed by fire. Stone buildings tend to last longer. Some have lasted for hundreds and hundreds of years and are still being used for their original purposes.

But the spiritual house of living stones Peter writes about is even more durable than stone buildings men have built on earth. And that is because God has built it. God has built it from an eternal foundation, a foundation that can never be destroyed. God has built this spiritual house on Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son sent to earth to accomplish the redemption of all mankind. That foundation stone is a living and precious cornerstone.

Today, a cornerstone is often just a ceremonial stone, with a date engraved on it and maybe some words to tell about its purpose and the building that rises from it. But at times in history, a cornerstone was a stone carved perfectly square, so that the walls of the building aligned with the stone so that they were straight and true.

Jesus Christ is such a historic cornerstone, and he is chosen and precious, too. He, the cornerstone of our faith, was chosen by God his Father to be the foundation rock of faith. The Scriptures state that the one who believes in him will be saved eternally. He is precious and valuable. He gave up his life blood for the dead stones who can become part of his precious house, his temple. Isaiah assures us that **“this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.’”** (Isaiah 28:16, NIV84) He is not to be ignored or thrown away.

But he was rejected and thrown away as useless and unimportant by those to whom he was first sent. The physical descendants of Abraham were chosen and selected by God to bring the Savior into the world. The Psalmist says that **“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; [the top of the arch, the keystone] the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”** (Psalm 118:22–23, NIV84) But they rejected him on a cross at the place of a skull more than 2000 years ago. And in that fact of history, we see a warning that we do not ignore, reject, or despise him.

To them and to everyone who rejects, ignores, or refuses to accept him, he is **“A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message.”**

Jesus Christ is our solid foundation, our cornerstone.

But you, living stones, part of that spiritual house made up of similar believing stones, you are more than just a dead stone. You have been called out of darkness. You have been chosen by God. Scripture tells you **“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. 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.”**

And all mankind is invited to become part of this spiritual house. That invitation is something you receive through the Word of God. Perhaps that was through your baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps it was from hearing or reading God’s words recorded in the Bible.

God tells you that you are his priests, his witnesses, **“a holy nation, a people belonging to God”** and you are to invite others to come and hear, to come and see, to come and **“Taste and see that the Lord is good”** (Psalm 34:8–9, NIV84) as the Psalmist writes.

Do you remember from the Old Testament what priests did? They approached God and served God directly. They served God on behalf of others. They served God by bringing gifts and offerings to him. They served God by repeating his word to others for their learning and benefit. They served God by offering sacrifices to God. The sacrifices of bulls and goats and lambs pointed to the picture of two kinds of sacrifices. They were a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. They were also a picture of the spiritual sacrifices every believer brings to God. They showed that every sinner was to humbly come to God and sacrifice themselves, to surrender themselves to God, seeking daily to give up their sinful thoughts and

words and lives so they could be created anew by the power of God. That is a spiritual sacrifice, a sacrifice involving your whole being, your spiritual self. In this way we can offer sacrifices which are acceptable to God.

And believers do it because Jesus Christ paved the way. ***“So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ And he says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’”*** (Hebrews 5:5–6, NIV84)

Every Christian has direct and free access to God, because the sin which formerly divided us from God has been removed by Christ. We should always remember that we are God’s priests and we should live as such. At the same time, all these spiritual priests should be active in offering to the Lord such spiritual sacrifices as are well-pleasing to God. The entire life of a Christian, all his thoughts, desires, and deeds, are such sacrifices, because it is the Spirit of God that lives in them and teaches and leads them to be grateful to the Lord for the gifts of his salvation. Listen to how the Apostle Paul speaks of those sacrifices in his letter to the Roman Christians. ***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** (Romans 12:1–2, NIV84)

These sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ because they are given in his name and for his honor as evidences and fruits of the life he has created in us. We can approach God only through Christ, because of his sacrifice for us. He and his sacrifice cover up all imperfections that still cling to our sacrifices.

Perhaps you have seen a beautiful stone church building, with its walls made up of many different colors of stone. I like that as a sort of picture of the Holy Christian Church. The Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints is the invisible gathering of believers to which every single human is invited. Peter tells us, tells all believers, ***“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.”***

Yes, by the grace of God you and everyone else who believes in Jesus Christ are part of God’s people, living stones.

You are part of something spiritual. You are living stones, part of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion or gathering of saints, of believers. That is what we call the “invisible church” because no human can see the Faith that makes one a member of the Holy Christian Church. Faith is what makes one a member, a part of that invisible church, that invisible temple of living stones. We can see fruits of faith, but not faith.

Never forget that ***“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. 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.”***

Lord, keep us in your mercy, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.