

WGUMC May 18, 2014 | Peter 2:2-10 "The Best Job Ever"

In all my years in California, I've been avoiding Yosemite because I hate crowds. Years ago, when I lived in Oregon, I visited the valley on a hot day in August with a million other people and vowed never to do that again. But we finally went last October and then got shut out by the government shut-down. So when I read that Tioga Pass had opened early this year and realized that Lisa was set to preach for me last weekend, I decided we could steal away for a night and a day.

A week ago Saturday, we were standing at Glacier Point and what I saw looked like eternity made out of rock. Every time I go into the mountains, I get a sense of timelessness and permanence there. The morning was quiet. The air was still. The rocks looked changeless. But that's because I'm not a geologist. A geologist would look down on those same stones and see a very dynamic landscape. She would see not inert rock but living stone, stone that had been thrust up and

ground down and pushed around for thousands, millions of years by buckling crust, creeping ice, flowing rivers, persistent wind. You could say that, over the eons, these rocks have been through hell and high water and came through it looking more beautiful than ever. Like some people I know. If only we were more like these living stones.

That's what our scripture is talking about this morning. The author of First Peter wants us come to Jesus, our living stone. [I Peter 2:4] Now there's an odd image when you first hear it. What is a living stone? It's not a Rolling Stone. When they get up on stage anymore, we're not sure all of them are still living. And it's not the people of Colorado, now that they've legalized marijuana. They would be living stoners. No, the question is what does it mean to say that Jesus is a living stone?

I Peter says that Christ is the cornerstone, the very foundation of our spiritual building. In other words, our faith,

our hope, our moral vision, our godly passion and compassion—in short, the spiritual edifice inside us, stands on this stone.

Now, you might point out to me that in this part of the world, stone buildings aren't very safe. When the ground shakes, the stones crumble and fall. But, remember, Christ is a *living* stone. When catastrophe strikes, when the ground underneath our feet begins to shake and shift, our living stone shifts, too. That way, no matter what happens, we don't lose our footing.

With Christ as the cornerstone, the church can be like one of those earthquake-safe buildings that are designed to sway instead of collapse. A church built of living stones is able to withstand any kind of disaster. And this church has seen a few. Despite the fact that we had a memorial service yesterday and will have another funeral tomorrow, we are here today, still standing on the promises, still leaning on the everlasting arms, still taking up the cross, still marching to Zion.

Yes, the followers of Christ have a firm foundation, but it is not an inflexible one. Because we have a living stone, we can have a living faith. I hope that you get a sense of that coming here Sunday after Sunday, but I've heard that it can seem kind of dead in a church. This sanctuary can seem a bit old and lifeless (I'm looking forward to changing that). The same people sitting in the same pews can seem changeless. But if you come around to see what happens between Sunday mornings at Willow Glen, you'd learn that we do grow living stones here.

I say that if you want lots of growth opportunities, if you want your faith to be challenged on an almost daily basis, come to work at a church. It's an entirely different kind of reality show were running here. Somewhere between Shakespearean tragedy and British comedy! And the full-time and part-time staff who work at this church are the stars.

At least in my book. Back when I was a solo pastor with little or no staff, I had to do everything. My first Sunday in my

first church was the organist's last Sunday, and because they couldn't afford a permanent replacement, I often had to lead the hymns *a cappella*. Yikes! Besides that, I had to type the bulletin (on a typewriter!) and cut and paste the newsletter. In every other church but this one, I taught Sunday School. I did the children's sermon. I planned VBS. I directed the Christmas pageant. I even tried to lead a youth group once. Ouch!

Here, we have such wonderful staff who can do all the things I'm lousy at and many of the things I'm good at. In fact, I could go away for weeks and not have to worry about what was happening around here. Lisa Jacobs, aside from being a fantastic youth leader, can preach a cut-to-heart sermon, while her assistant, Kat, shares in the leadership and provides the comic relief. Our Director of Music, Bob, aside from bringing us into the presence of God through music, can put a worship service together in his sleep. Tom, gets our ringing endorsement for directing our bell choir and can lead worship

like he was called to preach. Our office manager, Dee, can run interference and handle just about any emergency we can throw at her. Our preschool director, Lorene, will put in as much heart and more hours than anyone else. Our child-care providers, Akemi and Tim, along with our preschool teachers (including our own Michelle Partsch and Chris Fall), will keep loving our kids and making them want to come back for more. Our bookkeeper, Linda, with Jeanette's help, will somehow manage to pay all our bills with a smile. Our wedding coordinator, Karen, is waiting to hear about your wedding. Our new band director, John, is finding us new songs to sing. And our drummer, Christine, is keeping us all in time. So every day I think that Susan and I are blessed to be members of such a talented team.

In many ways, the staff of this church are like stones. Their skills are solid. Their commitment is strong. And, like those granite rocks in Yosemite, a few of them are ageless

(Bob)! At any rate, one thing I've noticed about those who work at this church is that after you've been around for a while, after you've been over a few waterfalls, your rough edges tend to get smooth. And with each passing year, you become more precious to us! You are like stones. When we put you into living water, your beauty really shows through.

So I can honestly say that I have the best job ever because I work with the best staff ever! I know that many of them couldn't be here today, but I invite the ones who are here to stand up front so we can give you a cheer.

[Distributing gifts]

Let's pray.

Living God, we thank you for giving us these exceptional individuals. Thank you for their unique gifts and for their heart of giving. I ask you to bless their hearts with passion, their minds with vision, and their spirits with strength so that they will be able to be nothing less than what you have created them to be.

For us, they are living stones, helping us to build this church into a spiritual house where we can "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." [2:5] Let them know that we couldn't do it without them and without your grace

working through them. We pray that we can be as much a blessing to them as they have been to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.