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May 3, 2026- 5th Sunday of Easter (A)
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Psalm 31; **1 Peter 2.2-10; John 14: 1-14**

'Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...' †

A Living stone, a 'Mighty Fortress' "The stone that the builder's rejected has become the cornerstone..." ¹ A cornerstone is not just some ceremonial stone laid at the corner of some edifice... it is an indispensable, foundational part of a project, whether a building or something else. Cornerstones are fundamental toward proceeding in any goal, the main support of the whole.

Our God has provided each of us with distinct and specific attributes, gifts, and opportunities. And most of us, at some point in our lives have tried to push away some of these gifts... to reject them because they seemed unwanted, only to discover that they are the principle and foundational means through which God works in our lives— these may be gifts of friendship, intelligence, beauty, or talent... or more difficult things to accept like personality, sexuality, addictions, or afflictions. Think about something foundational in your life, something that at some point you were too embarrassed to embrace... and how you came to understand that it was foundational to who you are, vital to your being. Similarly, there are things foundational in your spiritual life, as well as in the life of the whole Church, and vital to this parish.

In the field of theology, there is a term "ontology" that refers to the metaphysical concept of "being." Ontology is about God's being, who God is, and it's also about our being and who God created us to be. I believe that being a Christian is all about *becoming*. Becoming who "God chose us to be before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1.4). Throughout our human lives we change, like all of the creation, we grow, we develop, we adapt to the world around us. The Church uses the term "ontological change" to describe pivotal times of such growth— specifically, transformative periods in our lives and in our character that are instigated by God. The Sacrament of Baptism, which we celebrate today, is one such experience— a profound experience of inward spiritual grace offered by Christ, through the outward symbolic action of the Church.

Some of our present real-life circumstances also constitute ontological changes. The world is a scary place, with violence from wars and catastrophes everywhere we turn, ongoing political and institutional conflicts in our societies, not to mention financial stressors almost everywhere. The feelings we experience—fear and worry—are not unlike what Jesus' disciples were experiencing, when he spoke of leaving them. His reassuring words to them in today's passage (14.1)- 'do not let your hearts be troubled,' speaks to this. Actually, the Greek here is very specific, it reads "do not let your" (plural, all of you) 'heart' (singular) be troubled... That is, do not let your *one common heart* be troubled. For the disciples were of one heart, just as we are called to be... We must be of *one heart* and not allow ourselves to be troubled.

¹ Psalm 118.22, Matthew 21.42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20.17, and Acts 4:11

Many popular theologians and Christian writers have been referring to our present era as 'luminal.' Somehow hinting at the obvious, that we are at the threshold of uncertainty; standing on the threshold between what is known to what is unknown. However, I would submit that what is happening is more than this. I believe we are in the midst of a crisis, a time of great ontological change, not only for us as individuals, but for all humanity worldwide, *and especially* for God's Church. Let me try to explain...

In Greek, there are several words that can be used to express our English term "time," two of them are helpful to consider— *chronos* ('our time' or linear time) and *kairos* ('God's time'). *Chronos*, our time, is what we are used to, it's linear and has a distinct beginning and ending, it's measurable and temporal. *Kairos* or "God's time" comes from above, it's not easy to measure, it's infinite, eternal, without a beginning or an end. It's a time of vulnerability and of heightened opportunity (our English word 'crisis' is related to this Greek word *kairos*). So, it's important for us to consider how our present 'crises' may be times of opportunity and vulnerability in which God enters our lives. I'm not saying that God causes pandemics or devastating weather events, or the violent conflicts in our world, what I am saying is that God always has and continues to 'write straight with crooked lines.' God manages to break into our time just when we need God the most! *This* moment right now may be a moment of *kairos*, God's time. It's a time to reconsider who we are as 'The Church.' A time to reflect on the *that stone which was rejected*, Jesus Christ our Lord. The Church is not about this building, or how many people attend services, or how many people pledge money. It's about Jesus Christ, who came to us not to establish an institution, but to share the message of God's love and live among us.

The Greek word used in the Gospel today *monē* (*dwelling/ room*) to refer to 'dwelling places' prepared for us. That word has less to do with physical places and mansions in the heavens, and more to do with dwelling together *menō*. Remember at the beginning of this Gospel (1.14) we were told and 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' The Word, Jesus Christ became one of us and dwelt among us, literally 'pitched a tent' and stayed with us. Jesus makes the point of telling his disciples not to fear because he is preparing 'dwelling places' for all! The point is not to fear this unknown, luminal time, because we will dwell together with Jesus always, 'for where I am, you will be also.'

This is a good segue to the Sacrament of Baptism, which we celebrate today. Through baptism, we are changed and transformed, through baptism, we became part of the family of God. And today, these 2 boys will experience *new change* as members of Christ's body, and we who witness God's presence in them are also transformed and changed.

I'm fond of how the Christian teacher and writer, Max Lucado put it: "God loves you just the way you are, but God refuses to leave you that way." God's not finished yet. God wants us to be like Jesus, our cornerstone. To be like Jesus, who was willing to suffer, be rejected and isolated, and even die in order to transform the world. Like Jesus, "the living stone rejected by mortals yet precious in God's sight." Embrace this present time of crisis— God's *kairos* — and like living stones, allow ourselves to be built anew, with Jesus as our foundation.

And Jesus taught us how to do this, commanding us to love one another as he loves us. So we can become Jesus' eyes and ears, observing and listening to those around us. So we can be Jesus' hands and feet, reaching out to and carrying those who need us. So we can be Jesus' voice, shouting for justice, and reassuring the world living in fear of God's love, and of his ongoing presence with us.

He dwells among us, reassuring us that he is the way, the truth and the light in this world—and "where I am, there will you be also." †