

Sermon *Living Stones (Fragility Superpower)*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 5.3.26

Acts 7:55-60
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

I have a question for you. Where are your feet right now? Are your feet in church right now? Are you listening to this online? [Are you reading this at home?]. Let me ask you again, where are your feet right now?

Your feet can tell you a lot about your faith life. For those whose feet are in church right now, where are your feet pointed? They are pointed toward the altar. Your feet have brought you to a place of worship and are pointing you in the right direction.

For those participating online, where are your feet? What are your feet up to right now as you participate in this message? For two of us, their feet are in a Toyota, pointed east, driving through Alligator Alley to the Miami cruise port where they will later today board a Celebrity cruise ship and celebrate their two-year anniversary. But, they are participating online with us this morning. Speaking of online participation, this morning when the service went live on YouTube, a message was sent to 13,000 subscribers to participate with us online. By the end of this week, we will have over 7,000 views of this message – either in its entirety or through watching short videos of it. It's honestly a little staggering to imagine but it's happening.

For you all in person, everyone online [and for you reading this at home], I have a message for you: right now you are exactly where God wants you to be. You are just as God has created. And, you are right where you are supposed to be. One (or more) of you prayed for a sign – *God, can you please show me the way? Can you show me the path? Can you give me a sign?* Here's a sign: you are right where God wants you at this moment. Your feet could be doing a lot of other things right now. You could be playing golf, or sitting at the beach, or doing some really unhealthy things for your spiritual and physical life; but you are not. You are right where God wants you to be.

Since you are right where you are supposed to be, let me read you some ancient words from the Apostle Peter: *You come to God as a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective, you are chosen. You are valuable. You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.*

You are living stones built together into a spiritual temple, being made into a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices to God.

What a great image that is. You are stones, living and true, that build together the Temple praising God and making spiritual sacrifices which includes our praise and good works.

Peter most likely wrote these words in the year 66 or 67. He was martyred; killed; in 0067 for his believe in Christ Jesus. The Roman authorities arrested him and dragged him off to Rome. They tried to convince him to rescind all that he has been saying since the spring of 0032 when Jesus was resurrected. But he wouldn't. He couldn't. What he was preaching and teaching (and writing) was what he saw and experienced concerning the Word of Life. He watched Jesus be condemned and then die. He talked with Jesus in the resurrection; he was forgiven by Jesus (which he still had deep wounds on his hands and feet). Peter was made the foundation of the Church. He had no fear of death. There was nothing that Rome could take away from him that would make him rescind his faith in his Master and Lord. Most likely during the time leading up to his martyrdom, he wrote these words: *You are living stones being built in a spiritual temple as a holy priesthood making sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

I mention the year that he wrote because something monumentally important happened three years later. In the year 0070, the Roman army marched to Jerusalem. They surrounded the city to starve it. Then, they marched up, slaughtered the Levite priest and stone by stone destroyed the Temple. It is hard to overstate the fundamental destruction and shift this made for people of the Jewish faith. The Temple in Jerusalem was the place for sacrifices to be made to God for the sins of each person. A dove, sheep or cow was brought up to the Temple where it made a blood sacrifice for the atonement of sins. The Roman army stopped the sacrifices (and they still are stopped to this day). The Temple priests, the Levites, were either killed, imprisoned or fled. In the place of the Temple was the rise of the synagogue, the rabbi, and the sacrifice of learning and devotion. Just three years after Peter wrote that we are living stones built into a temple, the Temple was destroyed. I imagine how comforting these words would be to someone who lost the Temple and the sacrifices made there. We are now living into the priesthood of all believers and make sacrifices to God of our praises and good works.

So it is in this setting that we look at these readings and ask ourselves where in our life has the temple been destroyed? When have we had to radically alter and change our lives? When has grief affected us so deeply that it would be like the people watching their temple being destroyed? As living stones that once were rejected, when have you felt dejected and left out?

Your feet have brought you today to a place where you are hearing that you are precious. Although you may have been rejected and have felt left out, or left behind, nevertheless, you are valuable and you are precious and you are living stones. You are being built to offer holy and acceptable sacrifices of your life, of your praise, of your good works. And all of this acceptable to Jesus Christ.

When you think of a Temple, do you imagine something like a fortress? Something with large stones that can protect and keep invaders out. You, however, are living stones create a temple. That means big walls won't protect us. What then is our power? The superpower of the living stones is fragility. Let me repeat that: fragility is our superpower. Our temple is fragile. It is built on the cornerstone of fragility because our fragility is bringing superpower to God's faith and God being made known in the world. This might be the first time you've ever heard that being fragile is a power. The first thing that fragility does as our superpower is that fragility produces empathy. And empathy is the Church's superpower. The empathy of understanding you've been down. I've been down. And God didn't leave me or us there. God brought me and restored me.

Fragility as superpower means that we have empathy for those who have used their feet to run away from God. Our fragility superpower of empathy is to say, "*Yeah, I ran too. Unfortunately, God is faster than me. God has more power than we God can catch up and run and find me.*" Our superpower is empathy with grief; understanding loss as others have lost. Our superpower is identifying with the least and the lost because that's who Jesus himself identifies with. Those who are in prison, those who need food, those who need water, those who have been left behind. Jesus says, "*When you did it to the least of these, you did it to me*" because our superpower is fragility. And one of the expressions of that is empathy. I too have been hungry. I too have been left behind. And God doesn't leave me there. Why? Because we are living stones built together as a living and holy temple. So the first thing that fragility does, it produces empathy.

The second thing that fragility in the Church produces is adaptability. If you're fragile, you learn to be adaptive. And the church has adapted and changed over the last 2,000 years. We have adapted across every continent. We have just about every language today being spoken in a Church because we have adapted. Speaking of adaptation, Peter believed it was a movement for the people of the Jewish faith, those who were direct descendants of Abraham. And then metanoia – a changing of his mind – and he realized God shows no partiality. Peter made the Church adaptable and not to show partiality. There's not much more of a fragile church than one that sits on a sandbar with nothing between us and Texas except for the Gulf, right? We at All Angels by the Sea have learned to adapt. How about a congregation on an island that the average age is 74, right? We learn to adapt. Have you noticed that when you get older you either learn to adapt or you just stay in bed. Our superpower of fragility is made known in adaptability.

The third thing that fragility does, the third fruit that comes off of the fragility tree of the Christian church, of the living stones that are built together as one holy temple, the third piece is this: authentic connection with God and one another. On the days where everything's going great and you have no needs and you have no pains and your family's happy and on that day, do you really need God? On the days where you're fragile that's when we have an authentic prayer life with God. Fragility also gives us an authentic communication with one another.

When I was a junior in college, I was a part of a welcome team for the freshmen that are coming onto campus. I know, surprise. I'm like out in front saying hello to everybody (okay, no one is surprised by that). One this one fall day, out in front of the dormitory, I saw a guy wheel up because was in a wheelchair. His name is Jim. I immediately went to him. Why? Because fragility makes for authentic connections. In grade school, I met a guy named Shawn. I'm still friends with him on Facebook – he's an amazing photographer. He was born without the ability to walk. So there I was in early grade school; Shawn came up in a wheelchair; with that authentic communication; and he said, "Do you like my wheels?" And we had the most authentic, connective conversation that anyone in grade school can ever have.

On that day when I saw Jim, with his backpack and a really heavy book that made it drag on the ground, I went up to Jim and I said, "Hey man, can I help you with your backpack?" And he said, "No, no, no. I got it." And he was kind of embarrassed and I said, "Can I walk with you instead?" "Yeah," he said, "that'd be great." Authentic connection from fragility. Sean taught me about connection and authentic-ness through his own fragility which is his superpower. So Church, for those in the world; those specifically in in our society that are raising up youth and raising up

exuberance and look down on those who are aging. In our society with rampant agism, I need to remind you of what Peter is telling all of us and that you are living stones. Even though the stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective, you were chosen. You are valuable. You yourselves are being built like a living stone into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

You today with your feet that brought you right here, right where God wants you to be, you are chosen. You are royal. You are a priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession, and that the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light, you once were a rejected people, but now you are God's people. And with fragility as our superpower, we continue as a beacon of light, like a lighthouse on some little barrier island, we are this light that is shining out for others to remind them that you are living stones, built into a holy temple, to praise and sacrifice to God. Amen.