

Easter 5A 5/14/17 Mother's Day Coventry Cross
The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Tattersall

What do you think of when you think of a rock?

What size is it?

What type of rock? Smooth? Jagged?

Some of my friends are geologists, so I keep learning more about different types of rocks.

Some are hard and sturdy, while others are softer or more brittle.

Geologic time deals in millions of years while human time deals in decades.

Rocks tend to last a long time, however, rocks don't last forever. Eventually they are changed, perhaps by heat or pressure or erosion.

There are many sayings that involve stones and rocks.

When we want to say that something cannot be changed, we say that it is written in stone.

When we are searching for something, we say that we will leave no stone unturned.

When things are as bad as we can imagine they could get, we say that we have hit rock bottom.

When we have an impossibly difficult decision to make, we say that we are between a rock and a hard place.

When someone has no empathy or compassion, we say that they have a heart of stone.

Who in your life do you consider to be your rock?

Your spouse or partner? A parent? A friend? A pet?

Your rock is the person you can always count on, who is always there when you need them, the one who lifts you up when you are feeling low.

Perhaps there is a place you visit that helps you return to your center and remember who you really are—that you are beloved by God.

I hope that God, that Jesus, is also your rock.

We need the solid underpinning that is provided when we seek a deeper understanding of God.

We need the illumination that comes from cultivating an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Two of today's lessons included metaphors about rocks or stones: the psalm and the 1st letter of Peter.

The psalm calls God a strong rock, a crag and a stronghold, and a tower of strength. The psalmist also requests God to "lead me and guide me."

Peter also wrote about stones. Peter, Petrus, whose name means rock.

Peter says to come to God as a living stone. A stone rejected by mortals, yet precious in God's sight.

In this statement I hear Peter acknowledging that we are all flawed, that we make mistakes, that we sin. And yet that does not make God love us less. We are still precious to God. We still are useful to God. We can still be part of the foundation that God builds on to advance his kingdom in this world.

The image of stones that Peter paints is that the people are being built into a living temple, a living church, that the church is not built of inanimate geological stones but of the living stones that are the people of God. This image remains with us today.

Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are also part of the foundation upon which the kingdom of God is built. We are the rough, unhewn stones that God uses as his hands in this world.

The church is not this building. The church is this body of people. In community we learn to be strong and sure as the cornerstone. And at the same time, because we are living stones, we are not static. We change over time. We respond to our environment.

The work of fashioning us into suitable stones with which to build the church is an ongoing work. It does not end at baptism or confirmation. It continues throughout our lives. We change and grow. We are molded by our experiences.

You may recall that at my installation as priest in charge here over a year ago, Chuck McCray preached on how a congregation is like stone soup. We build on our rock, Jesus, as we build on the stone in stone soup, adding many things to make a delicious broth. We contribute love, caring, questioning, doubt, enthusiasm, effort, ideas.

Since the scripture tells us: build your life around your rock, I ask you to examine how you pattern your life. What do you build your life around? Your work? Your spouse? Your children?

Perhaps we should add prayer and study and service to the things around which we build our lives. When we feel that rock of faith underpinning us, we have the strength and the rootedness/grounding to reach out beyond our comfort zone. We can do more and be more. If we are off balance, then we cannot reach as far, we cannot take the bold stance

God is our strong rock. Jesus is our cornerstone, our foundation. We are their living stones. We are God's people, as Peter said in today's epistle. We build our faith on Jesus' teachings.

Without his example, we would not be living stones.

We are God's people and we have received God's mercy. We are God's people because we have accepted that gift of mercy. We have admitted our own vulnerabilities, and at the same time that makes us stronger. When we know where our weaknesses lie, that knowledge makes us more able to strengthen those weak places. That growth and ability to change are part of being living stones. We are not static. When we work together as God's people, we strengthen each other's weak places. Where one of us is weak, another is strong. Together we are far stronger than we are alone. Together we can help our community become a better place. Together we can build a strong church of living stones in which many can be sheltered and nurtured.