

Title: The Living Stones of Our Saviour

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks and praise that the good news of your son has been proclaimed in this place and in the courthouse before it for the past 150 years; may you give us and those who follow us the grace and courage to continue your proclamation in Placerville, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is a wonderful occasion. This parish is celebrating being in Placerville for 150 years. Being here in this place happened because of the work and dedication of many, many people. The current members of this parish are the latest community carrying the legacy of this place. This is a source of pride and this is a source of humility.

Now pride and humility are often like oil and water. It is hard to be humble and be prideful at the same time. But an occasion like this is one where we can be both – where the oil and water is mixed together. We are a holy salad dressing.

On July 20, 1861 two and half months after Mr. Charles Caleb Peirce's first service in Placerville, Church of Our Saviour was founded as a parish. As most of us know, Mr. Peirce was not very parochial. He sought to spread the word of God in the county. But since he traveled by foot, he was limited to the greater Placerville area. He was in Placerville and Coloma on the first and third Sundays and in Diamond Springs and El Dorado on the second and fourth Sundays. The histories don't mention what he did with himself on the occasional fifth Sunday.

Not unlike how we are feeling today, Mr. (don't call me Father) Peirce was a person who was prideful and humble. If offered a ride, he would reply that walking was good enough for Jesus. That's rather prideful and humble. He lived at Ohio House with his food and lodging paid for. He never accepted a salary.

In a sermon, C. C. Peirce said, "Poems . . . have always been cheifest and choicest of productions, after the Bible, to me; and no other writings after the Bible have been so profitable to myself. . . And here is also a 'Morning

Hymn.’ I have recalled it mentally, I think, every morning for many years.’¹ That morning hymn is what we will sing at the end of the 10:30 service. It was said that to read his sermons was disappointing, because they lacked the emotion that was brought to his spoken word.

Mr. Peirce never married, but he was very fond of children – other people’s children. Every December he gave books away to children. Even though he was never salaried, he spent more than \$17,000 on children’s books during his ministry here.²

His work in the county earned Mr. Peirce the title, The Apostle of El Dorado County. He was much beloved by many inside the church and outside. But not everything was rosy. Around the time of the turn of the nineteenth century, there was a faction at Our Saviour who wanted a younger and more vital priest. But the loyalists beat back the challenge.³ Mr. Peirce never really found any value in a diocese or a bishop. He resisted any bishop from exerting control on his churches.

C. C. Peirce was a Christian Socialist. He believed that the state owning all means of production was the closest system to that of Jesus’ teachings. If one read the gospels without prejudice, the only conclusion was that socialism was the only cure to capitalism’s autocratic, anarchic position toward labor and government. He was published in a Los Angeles socialist publication.⁴

C. C. Peirce was often found talking to himself while he walked from place to place. When asked who he was talking to, he replied, “I am talking to my older brother.” When he did a service outside of an Episcopal church, he never used the Book of Common Prayer. There were select families that he stayed with in his travels. They would have a special room they called, “Mr. Peirce’s room.”⁵

¹ Upton, Charles Elmer, *The Life and Work of the Reverend C. C. Peirce*, self published, Placerville, CA, pp. 48,51.

² *Ibid*, p. 57

³ *Ibid*, p. 60

⁴ *Ibid*, P. 63

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 76-77

On March 15, 1903, Charles Caleb Peirce died of Bright's disease. Before he died, his last words were recorded. Among them are: "I live not – I – but Christ liveth in me. I have always believed in the pure, orthodox, evangelical religion, but not in the frauds of priest-craft. Forty years of constant life will show what a man believes in – what his life is – where his money goes. . . . Sing at my funeral the 'Templar's Hymn.' . . . And then the final words: 'I die in peace.'"⁶ Bishop Moreland presided at Charles Caleb Peirce's funeral.

We could say that Mr. Peirce would have preached that we should treat people with respect and be open, direct, specific, and kind if you have an issue with someone. We might also say that this an issue in this morning's reading from 1 Peter.

First Peter was written by Peter's disciples, after his crucifixion, to churches in Asia during a time of persecution. The theme of the letter is to stand fast in the grace of God. The church, according to 1 Peter, is a home for the homeless.

The first part of the letter that we hear responds to what the author just previously said, "That word is the good news that was announced to you." So, if we take God's word into our hearts, we will rid ourselves of actions where we malign others and the author lists those things explicitly. If, indeed, we have tasted that the Lord is good, then we will long for pure spiritual milk. The author invites us to be living stones and a royal priesthood. It is this basis that is the foundation for the church. The foundation is not brick or mortar or concrete. The foundation is the people of God. And the people of God are a royal priesthood. You are priests offering spiritual sacrifices to God.

Earlier in this letter, the author describes Jesus as a living stone. It was Jesus who was rejected by religious and secular authorities. Yet Jesus is a living stone upon whom the followers of God build. John the Baptist told people, "God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham." (Matt. 3:9b) The people to whom this letter is written are a people who are living stones trodden on by an oppressive regime, but they are a royal priesthood. These people are to be, themselves, the building blocks of a spiritual house.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 88-89

Spiritual houses are the people of the church. Buildings are nice, but they don't count.

The author develops the metaphor of Jesus as the living stone. "Here (the author says) this Stone is living. It has life in itself and gives life to others. People may enter into personal, vital relationships with this "living Stone."⁷ Since Jesus was rejected, Christians are in good company when they are rejected. Just as Jesus was a living stone, Jesus' followers are also living stones. It is we, living stones, who build spiritual houses. The church is a gathering of the faithful.

What do these priests who are living stones do? The author says that all of us are to proclaim the mighty acts of God who called us from darkness to light. We are illuminated because we have received God's mercy.

We are a chosen people. "While these descriptions of the church are similar to those used of Israel in the Old Testament, this in no way indicates that the church supplants Israel and assumes the national blessings promised to them. The author just used similar terms to point up similar truths. As Israel was 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,' so too believers today are chosen, are priests, are holy, and belong to God. Similarity does not mean identity."⁸

Charles Caleb Peirce was at Our Saviour on two Sundays a month. Someone else, a lay person or persons, took up the slack. After Brother Peirce died, Our Saviour lacked a full-time priest for decades. Someone else, a lay person or persons, took up the slack – a royal priesthood. It was these living stones, who kept this parish together. Even when Our Saviour re-achieved parish status, major events and changes happened and because of and perhaps in spite of the clergy.

All of us are living stones building a spiritual house. As such, we to treat people with respect and be open, direct, specific, and kind if you have an issue with someone.

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Pe 2:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ *Ibid* (1 Pe 2:9–10).

Honoring 150 years of Our Saviour, being in this part of God's world, we bear Christ's imprint, a royal priesthood, building and inviting those who wish to be part of God's spiritual house.

Text: **1 Peter 2:1–5, 9–10** (NRSV)

2 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built^a into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,^c in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy. ⁹

^a Or *you yourselves are being built*

^c Gk *a people for his possession*

⁹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Pe 2:1–5, 1 Pe 2:9–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.