

Let us pray. Loving God, I pray that you would draw near to your people today. Send your spirit to us today, may our hearts be filled with joy and hope as we learn about you. Prepare us, as we listen for your word, to share it with others, and as we move forward, may we have eyes to look back and bear witness to your presence in our lives. Amen.

When you move to a new house, there are invariably some things that get lost. Hopefully it isn't anything important. Michelle and I have a bit of experience with that; in an earlier in-town move in Montreal, we managed to return a rental car with a trunk full of things we had planned to move to our new apartment. It took us ages to realize that was what had happened, and to this day, our kitchen table has only five chairs of the original six, with that empty spot just sitting there, accusing us of absentmindedness.

Hopefully, though, the something that you invariably lose isn't so obvious. After unpacking all our boxes here in St. John's, and as I was thinking about our passage from first Peter, about us being living stones that build a spiritual house, I realized something small that I was missing, an item from my past that wasn't hugely important to me, and was kind of ugly, and so I'm sure Michelle, at least, isn't sad that we decided to leave it behind.

But in order to describe it, I need to lay a bit of groundwork. For many of my summers when I was in high school and doing my undergraduate degree in Waterloo, I worked up at a Christian camp called Camp Crossroads in the Muskoka area, prime cottage-country for many people in southern Ontario. On Saturdays, when the campers had all gone back to their homes, the staff would often gather together in groups to go "off the reservation", to spend a little time off of camp property and rejoin the regular

world. One Saturday, some co-workers and I went to the little town of Gravenhurst, and decided we would have supper at a Boston Pizza. Gravenhurst was so little that the Boston Pizza was probably just about the only thing of note there, except for its claim to fame, well known by anyone who has spent time in the Muskokas, their giant Muskoka chair, otherwise known as an adirondack chair. It was bright yellow, tourists would climb it and take pictures, it was in local movies, and so on. Anyone who was anyone knew about it.

It so happened that as we were sitting there, a terrific storm blew up. The power was knocked out, and eventually a waiter came by and told us it was unlikely to come back on any time soon, so we left. Outside, we were astonished to see the state of the town: trees were down, siding was blown off houses, and the famous Gravenhurst chair, in its banana yellow glory, had exploded practically into matchwood. I pushed through the crowd, and, as a silly memento that would only be tossed years later, I grabbed a fractured piece of that great chair.

To the uninitiated observer, that memento would have looked like a crummy old splintery bit of wood with a bit of paint on a few of the sides. Taken out of the context of the chair, it wasn't really the sort of item you could put on display in your house, or at least, so Michelle instructed me. On its own, it didn't seem terribly special. Also, I seem to have a knack for losing chairs when I move.

The passage in first Peter talks about a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession". These are grand words to describe us. There are others in Scripture, words about us being the "body of Christ", a magnificent claim

when we consider who Christ truly is. We are a “city on a hill”, shining out like a lighthouse. We are a “spiritual house”.

Those images are huge, they are poetic and powerful. These are the images of us as God’s children, as members in the universal Church.

We often forget those images, though, because we tend to focus on the smallest pieces, on the individuals instead of the community. It’s like looking at that splintered piece of wood instead of the landmark chair. We look at the person to our left, or to our right. We look at the minister, we look at *ourselves*, and we expect to see the whole picture, the whole body of Christ, the whole city, the whole chair.

The message this morning is a message of encouragement. The words of Scripture in First Peter 2:2-10 are a message to us when we need a lift. I don’t know where each of you is at in your life right now, some days I hardly even know where I am at, but I do know that sometimes I don’t feel like a city on a hill shining holy light, or like a powerful voice of the body of Christ. I bet that you can relate to the feeling that some days, I feel as productive in the Kingdom of God as a rock.

So when Peter writes about “living stones” building up a spiritual house, that is a metaphor I can hope for. When I feel tapped out, pinned down by a world of worries and drained of energy, I can trust in the good news that the Kingdom is not built out of me alone. We are not meant to be alone, and the mission of God is not something we pursue alone. The whole reason for this church, for St. David’s, is that we are trying to come together to be that spiritual house. You are one brick of that house, and I am one brick as well. When this congregation shines a light in the world, we little stones are a part of that.

I am so thankful for all I have seen St. David's do already. For the lonely people that I see, for the people of this community who visit, and pray, and care so deeply for us all. I am so grateful to see the people who are brought together in this place because we provide programs for them. I am thankful for the aid that we are able to give to people who walk in through the doors during the week, needing food and clothes, or needing counsel and forgiveness.

We are even a part of a house that is larger still. Through our national church, we are bringing food to the hungry in south Sudan, educating young women in places where such a thing is unheard of, curing and preventing disease and malnourishment, helping mothers have healthy babies and stay healthy themselves. Our spiritual house saves lives, and we are the stones that make it up.

When we wheel up our cart of food in a few minutes, and gather our hard-earned money together, I will pray that it will be used for God's work in the world. But when the money leaves your hand and enters the plate, or when the food leaves your hand and finds its way onto that cart, I hope that you don't lose your sense of participation along with it. All that we do here, every person that is reached through our ministries, every word of love that is shared because it was learned here, in all of these things we are shining God's light into a world that needs it. We are all a part of this community, and we are all a part of these acts. Even if you don't have a penny to give, your prayers, your presence, like a spiritual stone, you build up this church to do this work.

When Peter writes this way, he is creating a parallel between us and Christ. We are living stones, just as Christ is. Peter quotes the scriptures that call him a "cornerstone chosen and precious", and "a stone that the builders have rejected" that

has been turned into “the chief cornerstone”. In this passage, the believers are also called living stones, like Christ. In our role as stones, we are lifted up as chosen and precious, and in our role as stones, we are redeemed; though we were once worthy of rejection, we are by the grace and the power of God now the first stones chosen to build with. We are linked and likened to Jesus Christ in our position as a piece of the whole. Jesus is the foundation, the unique and perfect guide for us as we build. By his example, we can be like him, and together, because of Him, we can build something that brings glory to God.

So if you ever wonder what you have accomplished to shine God’s light in the world, don’t forget this. You are a stone in this spiritual house, or if you haven’t plugged in here, you can become one. Here, you are a part of something bigger than your own life and worries. I pray that you will find energy in that, that you won’t just look at a stone and ignore the house. May we build each other up, may we give each other strength and courage, and may we work together day by day to bring God’s love to a world that needs it sorely. This is not something we are called to do alone, it is something we are doing together. Like that piece of banana yellow wood, may we be a part of something worth seeing, even if we can’t live up to that claim on our own. May God take us and build us together into a community that shares the Good news in the world, and may we little stones find joy in that work. Amen.