

TEXT: 1 Peter 2:4-6

THEME: TRUST IN THE LIVING STONE!

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." NIV

Dear Lois, family, and friends of dear departed brother, Earl,

Earl enjoyed telling the story of how he almost was not accepted as a member of Trinity Lutheran Church. The pastor at the time had heard that Earl was a mason and assumed he was a member of the secret society or lodge that teaches you must earn your way to heaven through your good works. Because of that false teaching, our church members cannot also hold membership in a lodge, like the Masons. When the pastor asked Earl if he were a Mason, Earl responded that he was. As the pastor began to explain the problem with that, Earl responded, "I'm a mason, but it's what I do, not what I belong to." Earl became a member of our church.

Using his masonry skills, Earl worked on several projects here at the church. At one point, the entire chancel area was remodeled. Harold Van Driessche enlisted Earl's help with that project, putting in the side steps and other improvements. Later, when Pastor Muetzel wanted a new church sign on the corner of Broadway and 33rd Street, he asked Earl to head up the crew. Earl then enlisted the help of Harold Van Driessche, who jokingly asked Earl, "Don't you know how to say 'no'?" Here at Trinity, we are thankful neither of them knew how to say "no."

Well, in our text, God tells us that he does some masonry work, too. He says, **"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."** (Zion is another name for the Church, the family of believers in Jesus as our Savior.) That stone—that chosen and precious cornerstone—is Jesus. Jesus is the Rock on which our faith is built. He is the cornerstone of the Church.

God the Father sent his Son, Jesus, to be our Savior from sin, death, and hell. Jesus willingly obeyed his Father and took on our human flesh—became one of us—so that he could be our Substitute. As our Substitute, he lived a perfect life of obedience to our heavenly Father's will. That perfect obedience is now credited to you and me. Then, as a perfect human being, Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins. When Jesus cried out on the cross, **"It is finished!" (John 19:30)**, our debt to God was paid in full. That redemptive work of Jesus is the

cornerstone on which the holy, Christian Church—the family of believers in Jesus Christ—is built.

All of us, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, believe in Jesus as our Savior, are living stones that are built into the spiritual house of God. We are built around Jesus, the “**chosen and precious cornerstone,**” who determines the line of our life, the direction of our life, the way we live.

By the grace of God, Earl was one of those living stones. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Means of Grace—the Gospel in Word and Sacraments—he had come to believe in Jesus as his one and only Savior from sin. That had not always been true in his life; Earl was baptized when he was 59 years old. But he was...and is...a living stone, built into God’s Church. He faithfully heard God’s Word and received Lord’s Supper. He loved the Word and the precious comfort that Holy Communion gave him. The last time I had the privilege of sharing the Lord’s Supper with Earl was at Brian’s House. He didn’t have his hearing aid in so I had to get right next to his ear and shout the precious words. I’m sure the entire facility heard that communion service, but that was maybe a good thing, too. Earl thanked me for that holy meal that assured him of the forgiveness of his sins and strengthened his faith for his walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The next time Earl receives that meal it will be in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ in person.

Earl and Lois were married almost 38 years—not bad for a second marriage for both of them. Earl worked hard to support his family and his extended family, putting in a full day at Dow and then doing masonry work for others on the side. He and Lois loved to travel and they made several memorable trips out east, out west, and to the last frontier, Alaska. In these last few years, one of their simple joys was going out to a restaurant to eat.

Was Earl perfect? No, not by human standards. None of us are. By nature, we are all crooked, jagged, broken stones. We have defects and flaws. Sometimes people expect us Christians to be perfect and when they see that we are not, they use that as an excuse not to come to church. I sometimes tell such people, “If you find a perfect church, don’t join it...you’ll just ruin it.” Earl, you, and I are not perfect in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God we are—all because of Jesus. Because of Jesus, we know that Earl “**will never be put to shame.**” We know that right now Earl is in the presence of our Savior, waiting for the resurrection of the body. So even though we mourn our loss, we rejoice at his gain, and we long for the day when we can join him in the heavenly mansions. Amen.