

Sermon for Sunday, November 12, 2023

**Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY**

“A Spiritual House Built on Christ”

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Decorah, Iowa**

[Click here to read scripture for the day.](#)

Beloved people of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This passage has some weighty and powerful images. Christ is described as a living stone, a cornerstone of faith, but also as a stone that can make people stumble, a rock that can make people fall.

What comes to mind when you think about stones? They can bring such beauty to our world. We see this in the bluffs around Decorah and in the work of local stonemasons. Stone memorials often help us honor our blessed dead, those we remember this Veteran's Day weekend and so many others. Stones can provide shelter and comfort and cause us to stumble and fall. As people, we throw stones at others, literally and metaphorically.

1Peter calls us living stones. This speaks of the capacity we all have:
to harm others and to shelter,
to tear down and to honor,
to obstruct and to build up.

What will we, as living stones, do with such weighty power and responsibility? We're called to come to Christ to be built into a spiritual house. That is what a congregation can be - a spiritual house made up of living stones, built on the cornerstone of Christ.

That is what you are, Good Shepherd. There is room here for you, for others, to be welcomed, embraced, healed, transformed. Within this spiritual house there is rest; there is nourishment; there is conviction and challenge. There are mirrors that reflect back each person's intrinsic goodness and reveal sins. Those mirrors are encountered in worship and in relationship with others. Here you are assured that your sins cannot hold you down. You belong to Christ who releases you from the press and weight of them. You are sent out to be faithful living stones - to use your power in community in ways that will shelter, comfort and honor others in the world. I'm so grateful for the spiritual house that is Good Shepherd. Christ is your cornerstone. The Spirit will continue to form and shape and build this spiritual house.

You've done a lot of important work recently on the physical house for the mission of this congregation. Back in 2017, you engaged in a process of listening, asking, "How do the buildings and spaces help us serve God and others? How could they help us serve God and others in new ways?" As a result of that listening, you've done important physical projects to help you live out your mission. And you've become carbon neutral!

This has been essential and important work. Yet I'm grateful that there have also been many opportunities for you to be built up as a spiritual house, to tend to life together in Christ. The racial justice work is one example of this. That Statement is a mirror that reflects the intrinsic dignity of all God's people and the way all Americans are harmed by the lie of white supremacy. The good news of Jesus works to liberate us all from this crushing lie and to rebuild the church into a home for all.

Within Good Shepherd, you've also addressed how you live out your mission together. Changes to the Council and committee structure are strengthening the foundation of this house. And thanks to the work of the Stewardship Committee, you're living into new ways of being a spiritual house through the Flock Ministry. Being part of a Flock and part of a larger spiritual house, asks you to let go of focusing on your own piles of rocks, whatever those may be, and to instead offer yourselves for something larger.

You are living stones, part of a beautiful spiritual house. Together as God's people, you are a temple of God's presence and a way God is known in the world. God has given you a strong foundation for hope with Christ Jesus.

Today you are invited to give generously to the mission of the spiritual house that is Good Shepherd and to our larger ELCA. As God's people, we're invited to give because generosity is good for us. The practice of giving forms us into grateful and generous people. Jesus says where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. We shape our hearts and our lives by how we choose to use our money and our time. Giving also helps us to trust that God will provide and to experience abundance.

We are also invited to give generously as congregations because we can do more together to shelter, honor, and comfort others. This is certainly true for us as part of the ELCA. Together as the ELCA we're accompanying God's people in the Holy Land, Ukraine, the Middle East, South Sudan, on the Southern Border, and in so many other places through our Lutheran Disaster Response. Through our Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service we're helping to welcome others into shelter and safety. Our Lutheran Social Services ministry helps families to stay together in their homes; and our ELCA World Hunger ministry works to help all people have enough to eat.

Good Shepherd gives 26% of the operating expenses to ministry beyond the congregation. This supports our vital ELCA work as well as local work like the Decorah Community Food Pantry, legal clinics for immigrants, and local AMMPARO work accompanying migrant families. I've loved giving to Good Shepherd knowing that as I do, I'm giving to so many vital ministries that I value. When you give to Good Shepherd, you can know that you are helping to build up a worldwide house of refuge and shelter.

You are a living stone, part of a spiritual house, with Christ as your strong foundation.

God is with you and God is at work through you.

Let's join in a time of reflection and silent prayer.