Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter, May 7, 2023

Texts: 1 Peter 2:2-10 and John 14:1-14

*Peace and grace to you God our Creator and Christ Jesus our Redeemer.*

*Stones were used to make altars. Abraham built many altars and each one was a significant reminder for him of the where and when he encountered God. In Genesis 12:6-8, Abraham builds altars to God at spots where God reminds Abraham of his covenant. He built an altar to the Lord on the land God had shown him at the oaks of Mamre and where he met the tree strangers. He built an altar at the site where God had taken him to sacrifice Isaac. And in some cases, God directly instructs them to build an altar like God did in Genesis 35, when he tells Jacob to build an altar at Bethel.*

*God provided for the Israelites needs even from the most unlikely sources. The prophet Isaiah reminds us in Isa 48:21,*

*“*They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;
he made water flow for them from the rock;
he split open the rock, and the water gushed out.”

*They used stones for identifying wells like the spring that God guided Jacob to and where he stacked stones to identify it and it became known as Jacob’s well near Shechem.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is here that Jesus meets the Samaritan woman in John 4. The significance of Jacob’s well is that it provided an opportunity for Jesus to present Himself as the life-giving Messiah to a Samaritan woman and, later, to her whole village. The woman had asked, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” The answer is a resounding “yes.” Jacob may have provided his children with physical water in an arid land, but Jesus provides His children with “living water” in a spiritual wasteland. The life Jesus gives satisfies all our needs and springs up to eternal life (*[*John 4:14*](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%204.14)*).*

*Stones were used to seal things like tombs. Jesus’ tomb. Lazarus’ tomb, alabaster jars, etc. And the stones were rolled or removed so that the power of God was shown in all of God’s glory.*

*Stones are an important and steadfast visual that mark places to remember acts of God or people of God. And let’s not forget that Christ chose Peter to be “the rock” on which the church will be bit. Stones guide our way when our path seems unsure.*

*On the early morning of April 25th, 2023, the faithful community of Nathanael Lutheran Church in Dagmar, MT experienced the deeply felt loss of their church consumed by fire. There is nothing left but the basement stones and the brick (stone) chimneys. All the rest is either ash or crumpled metal. As the agriculture business changed and the farms got bigger and the town smaller, residents who lived elsewhere said that seeing the church and steeple gave them peace amidst great change. This church building is not so different from the stones used to build altars for honoring God, the wells that provided water, the tombs that couldn’t hold the power of God to resurrect His Son. It was a place where generations of Christ-followers came to worship and glorify God. It is a place where Christ-followers come to worship and glorify God. The Nathanael Lutheran Church building is a place and a memory, but it is not the church. None of our church buildings are the Church. We are the church… you and me.*

*In our Gospel reading today from John 14, the disciples are distressed. They keep hearing Jesus tell them that He is going away. They don’t understand what that means for Jesus, for them and for the rest of the world. Jesus may be describing a different realm or place, but the disciples bring the conversation back around to them and our dear planet Earth. The questions they are asking are fair and they are sharing their fear of the future, their fear of the unknown, their fear of not having a road map that highlights all the stone markers along the way to this place Jesus is going. It is so hard to follow Jesus when we don’t see Him. I think they get the sense that they are in trouble that the times ahead are not smooth sailing or paved roads. And indeed, shortly after the death of Jesus they are rudderless and even after Jesus’ resurrection they know they have been left to deal with the backlash and uncertain futures. Who wouldn’t be scared silly. I think we would like proof too. I mean how do you know what path to take without some sort of guidance, a map, or a trail of rocks?*

*Jesus instructs us on the path with these simple words “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe[a] [[2]](#endnote-2)in God; believe also in me. (John 14:1)” Believe in Jesus. Jesus is our roadmap. Jesus is the trail of stones by which we know Jesus “is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)” And if you feel too weak to believe, then believe in Jesus for the works you have seen Him do. “So, have faith or have faith in the works you seen come from me – either way they are from God (a paraphrase of Jesus’ words). We don’t need stones to guide us to find God. We have Jesus who reveals God to us.*

*Peter in his letter is entreating us to see Jesus first through the eyes of the unbeliever as the corner-STONE that was rejected as imperfect, flawed, lacking and unworthy in this earthly world. In finding and meeting Jesus, we become living stones and with Jesus as our cornerstone we are built up into the body of Christ. Jesus the Christ and God through the Holy Spirit build us into “a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.”[[3]](#endnote-3)*

*Life throws us curve balls, disappointments, joy, laughter etc. but that is not the sum of me or you or how we are together in Christ. The good people of Nathanael are not a church because of the building or the stones that made it. The good people of Nathanael are the church because Christ opened their hearts, and they believe. They believe Jesus the Christ is their way, their truth, their life, and their stone. I pray and hope that each of you believes this too, for yourself and your community. We are a resurrection people who rise to “Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed. Alleluia”*

1. Sychar cannot be found on current maps because the city was destroyed. There is a well though that is near Shechem (Tel Balata by archeologists). In Genesis 33:19, Jacob bought property near Shechem and lived there for many years. [https://www.gotquestions.org/Jacobs-well.html accessed May 1](https://www.gotquestions.org/Jacobs-well.html%20accessed%20May%201), 2023. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. (a) [14.1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+14%3A1-14&version=NRSVUE#en-NRSVUE-26659) Or *You believe, New Revised Standard Version Updated* Edition, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+14%3A1-14&version=NRSVUE>, accessed May 3, 2023 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “A Preacher’s Guide to Lectionary Series – Volume 1: Thematic Plans for Years A, B and C; compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2016, page 36.

All Bible texts are copied from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, National Council of Churches, copyright 2022 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)