

**Title: Living Stones**  
**Text: 1 Peter 2:4-7**  
**Preacher: Rev Stu Cameron**  
**Date: August 18, 2013**

What an amazing journey Time to Build has been.

Six months ago we moved out of the building we had worshipped in for 18 years.

Straight away the contractors moved in.

The building was stripped.

Walls knocked down.

Nothing was left, except a shell.

But then a new building started taking shape.

Scaffolding went up, as did walls.

A new car park emerged out of the mud.

Even palm trees were moved.

New spaces constructed.

A new church is almost built.

Except that we aren't building a church. We are constructing a building in which a church gathers.

The church is not, and has never been a building. It has always been, and always will be, the people of God gathered in Jesus' name.

Jesus said to Peter and the disciples:

I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.  
(Matthew 16:18)

And so, as we have been building new facilities, Jesus has been building us – not just at Robina, but also at Pac Pines. We are one church – Jesus' church – meeting in two locations in six communities, starting with Crossroads on Friday morning and finishing with 12two on Sunday evening. But we are the church gathered as well as scattered. We are the church as through the week we serve our city and world in Jesus' name.

Newlife is not a building, or a program or a ministry team.

Newlife Uniting is an Acts 2 church  
with an Acts 1:8 mandate  
and a Matthew 28 commission.

We are an Act2 2 church: Our story began almost 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit came like a rushing wind and fire and a transformed frightened and bewildered disciples into a revolutionary movement.

We have an Acts 1:8 mandate: In the power of the Holy Spirit we bear witness to the Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the very ends of the earth.

We have a Matthew 28 commission: Jesus himself has charged us to make disciples of the nations – baptizing and teaching wherever we go.

In February I shared my conviction that through 2013 God was calling us as a church into:

Greater encounters with him, that leads to a greater harvest for him that gives greater glory to him.

In so many different ways God is doing greater things in our midst. The Holy Spirit is moving amongst us in powerful ways. Jesus is building his church all around us. This week I asked the ministry team to jot down some stories of God's activity in our midst. This is just some of what God is doing at Newlife:

### **12two**

One of the young adults who comes to 12two invited his sister a while ago to Church, she's started coming and three weeks ago brought her boyfriend. IT was his first time ever in Church. We did an altar call, he responded and came down the front and gave his life to Jesus. He's been back every week since, is plugged into a small group and cannot explain the change that God is doing in his life!

### **Crossroads**

The Crossroader who decided to become a Christian because he decided Jesus must be like the volunteers he observed over months at Helensvale.

The Crossroader who said, 'Thank you for being God's guide to me.'

The Carer who needed immediate family help, referred by Crossroads to Newlife Care. The next Friday said she didn't know where to go for help for her and her children except to call us. She was overwhelmed with the support she received from NLC. Now she can't wait to visit every Friday. She is so close now to making her choice for Christ.

The Crossroader who got her Carer to take her to Word bookstore and showed me the bible. She then handed it to me the next Friday and asked me to show her the verses how to become a Christian. I did that.

A Carer who said, 'I'm a sister of Mother Earth but you people have something here I don't know about, what is it?'

Michael Hands preached an absolute cracker of a message about the love of God. Dee is a carer who's been in our prayers for more than a year. She has been so close to stepping into the Kingdom & today I had the privilege of setting up a conversation between her & Sue Vourlides immediately after Michael preached where Dee took that faith step into the love of God. What was really cool was that Michael didn't make an appeal. One of the amazing aspects of this is that every angle of Michael's life he referred to was a mirror image of Dee's life. Sue Vourlides will be discipling Dee to see her grounded in her faith. There are another 3 carers so close to taking this same faith step. I believe God will bring them home to Himself very soon.

One balmy day in the South Pacific, a navy ship spied smoke coming from one of three huts on an uncharted island. Upon arriving at the shore they were met by a shipwreck survivor. He said, "I'm so glad you're here! I've been alone on this island for more than five years!"

The captain replied, "If you're all alone on the island why do I see THREE huts."

The survivor said, "Oh. We'll, I live in one, and go to church in another."

"What about the THIRD hut?" asked the captain.

"That's where I USED to go to church."

We all have distorted images of the church based on our prejudices and experiences. Church is a place we go to, or a place we used to go to.

One pastor (Colin Smith) I read this week identified four partial and distorted images of the church in our day:

- First is the church as a petrol station. For some people today, the church is a place where you fill up your spiritual tank when you're running low spiritually. Get a good sermon, and it will keep you going for the week. Now, church should replenish us – but that's not all that the church is called to be.
- Another common image of the church is as a cinema. For many people, the church is a place that offers entertainment. Go for an hour of escape, hopefully in comfortable seats – bad luck there folks. Leave your problems at the door and come out smiling and feeling better than when you went in. Now church should offer sanctuary, but that is not all the church is called to be.
- Then there is the church as a pharmacy. Here, church is the place where you can fill the prescription that will deal with your pain. For many the church is therapeutic. Now church should always be a place of healing, but that's not all the church is called to be.
- Finally, and perhaps most dangerous of all, there is the church as a shopping mall. The shopping mall church is the place that offers the best products in a clean and safe environment for you and your family. This church offers great service at a low price—conveniently all in one stop.

The church is not a place or a building. The church is simply a spiritual petrol station or pharmacy or shopping mall or cinema. The church is people gathered by Jesus in his name engaged in his mission for his glory. The bible gives us some beautiful metaphors to help us better understand God's design for the church. Over the next few weeks we are going to explore those metaphors, starting today with the church as a Spiritual House. Let's read from 1 Peter:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans 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.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.”  
(1 Peter 2:4-7)

In Jesus' day any building of substance – a palace or temple –was made of stone. A couple of years ago I had the privilege of travelling to Israel. I spent time in and around Jerusalem, particularly the remains of the temple that stood in Jesus day. Particularly moving was seeing the stone rubble of the temple Jesus worshipped in; the same temple destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. The only standing remnant of the wonder of the ancient world is a portion of the Western Wall, more commonly known as the Wailing Wall.

In the passage we just read, Peter refers to the church as a Spiritual House made of living stones. He quotes two Old Testament passages – one from Isaiah, the others from Psalms – that establishes that the foundation of this spiritual house is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, Peter refers to Jesus as a living stone, a cornerstone and a capstone. Each description confirms a profound truth.

First, Jesus is a Living Stone. This doesn't make sense at first. We know that stone is inanimate, lifeless, and dead. Stone can't move of its own volition, can't breathe and can't speak.

Jesus is a living stone in that he who was rejected and abused by men,  
he who was crucified cruelly and who died agonisingly,  
he who was wrapped in grave clothes and placed in a tomb –  
he who had seemingly succumbed to the grave, whose body was left to the worms –

this same Jesus - in the resurrection power of the spirit broke - the chains of sin, death and grave, and bust forth from the tomb with not only life, but with life giving power!

The rejected one is the Exalted One!

Every time we gather in Jesus' name, we do not celebrate the memory of a dead friend; we revel in the presence of a crucified and risen Lord.

The resurrection of Jesus is the exclamation mark that shouts the sufficiency of the Cross.

For Peter, Jesus is not just a living stone, he is the cornerstone. In ancient building, the cornerstone was the first stone laid out by the builder before any other. The rest of the building would take its form and shape from the placement of the cornerstone. The rest of the building would effectively rest on the cornerstone. Without a well selected and well placed cornerstone, the builder risked ending up with a pile of misshapen rubble.

Here is the point. The church is a Spiritual House built by God that takes its shape and form from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Our foundation is in him alone. More than that, he who is the Living Stone, by his grace and through faith, animates our life with his resurrection power so that, miraculously, we become living stones ourselves.

God does not dwell in an inanimate temple made of stone and wood or concrete and steel, but in the midst of a people animated by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit.

A church that is not built on the cornerstone foundation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is no longer a church, but a club. God is doing the building, but we must cooperate with that building.

Finally, Jesus is not just a living stone and a cornerstone, but also the capstone. Quoting the Old Testament, Peter says of Jesus, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.' Literally translated, the word is 'stone that is at the head of the corner.' While scholars debate what this actually means, Scott McKnight helps us with this:

The cornerstone is the first stone laid that forms the angles and foundations for the structure, where the capstone is the last stone put into a building, which becomes its climactic stone.  
(Scott McKnight)

The capstone is the icing on the cake, the cream on top, the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle - the finishing touch. Here's the point. The church is a Spiritual House that has its foundation in Jesus, and which finds its completion in Jesus. More than that, being constructed from living stones, the church is a Spiritual House that finds its life in the resurrection life of Jesus.

The church is a Spiritual House shaped and formed by Christ the Cornerstone, that finds its life in Christ the Living Stone and which is complete only in Christ the Capstone.

Paul put it this way; in him – that is Christ – we individually and his church live and move and have our very being.

Peter piles the metaphors up further though. He describes the church as:

(The church is a) spiritual house...a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So the church is a Spiritual House made up of we, who are not only living stones, but also a holy priesthood that makes spiritual sacrifices. What the heck does this all mean?

Again, in Jesus' day there were thousands of priests who would daily make sacrifices to God on behalf of the people to atone for their sins, and so seek to restore their relationship with God. The blood of thousands of animals was spilled. But no longer is this necessary. Paul says this in Romans:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.  
(Romans 3:25)

Through his crucifixion, Jesus made a once and for all time and for all people sacrifice. If by faith we receive that sacrifice, not only are our sins forgiven, but as Lew so beautifully reminded us last week, our relationship with God is restored. We who by our sin had separated ourselves from God, have now been brought near to God through the shed blood of Jesus.

So if Jesus made the once and for all time and for all people sacrifice, what are the spiritual sacrifices we offer to God that are acceptable to him? Again we turn to Romans, where Paul says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.  
(Romans 12:1)

Paul starts Romans 12 with one of the most powerful and profound words in the bible; 'Therefore'. For the first eleven chapters he has eloquently articulated the saving work of Jesus Christ – how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus liberates us from the power of sin and death – how the Cross of Christ demonstrates the Embrace of God – how the empty tomb declares the resurrection power of God. In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul is effectively saying this:

Salvation is not found in the sacrifice we make, but in the sacrifice Jesus made.  
Redemption isn't discovered in the work we do, but through the work Jesus did.  
Eternal life is not earned through the love we give to God, but in the love given to us by God.

After laying out the essentials of the gospel, he stops and says, 'Therefore!' Therefore, in the light of what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ, here is our rightful response. Paul is saying that in Christ God has already said 'yes' to us; here is how we say 'yes' to him.

We lay down our lives for the one who laid down his life for us.

We who are living stones - animated by his life - are called to be living sacrifices and so enter into his death, and through his death, his resurrection. David Platt puts it directly:

The call to follow Jesus is more than an invitation to pray a prayer; it's a summons to lose your life.  
(David Platt)

Simply put:

A spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God is any thought, word or action offered to God in response to, and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Peter offers us such an important word when he says that we make spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God **through** Jesus Christ.

We make acceptable sacrifices only through him who made the perfect sacrifice.

Here is how it works:

Every time we pray in Jesus name we are offering spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time, in response to God's generosity, we are generous, we are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time we tells others about the hope we have in Jesus, we are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time we serve in Jesus' name, we are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time a Kidzlife leader shares about Jesus, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time a musician or singer uses their gifts to lead others in worship, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time a Connect team member offers hospitality to a newcomer, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time a Crossroads team member extends love to a carer or client, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time one of our gardeners mows the lawn or weeds a garden bed, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time one of our office volunteers greets a guest, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Every time one of our Op Shop or Newlife Care or Princess for a Day or Caravan Park team members serves sacrificially, they are offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

When in response to God's grace we serve in any capacity – no matter how large or small the task – when we do this, we are making a sacrifice through the perfect sacrifice made by Jesus. When this happens, that act of service is elevated and enlarged far beyond our imagination. When we serve in Jesus' name we are participating in God's mission in the world, in the building of his church and the extension of his kingdom on earth. What an awesome privilege!

Here is the thing:

We are not saved by our good works.  
We are saved for good works!

Paul says this in Ephesians:

For we are (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.  
(Ephesians 2:10)

The Greek word for workmanship is poiema, which traces to our English word 'poetry'.

We are God's poetry! Our as some translations put it, 'We are God's masterpieces...'

We are God's poetry, lives re-written by Jesus not to sit on a shelf gathering dust, but lives blessed by God to be a blessing.

When God saved you, he didn't save you to sit around on your blessed assurance waiting for the inevitable day when you breathe your last and you get your one way ticket to a heaven in the clouds. What a travesty! What a waste! We were created in Christ, saved by Christ – for good works that God took an eternity dreaming up for us, just for us and our unique gifts and passions.

We don't have to wait until we die to enjoy the abundant life that Jesus promised. We can enjoy that abundant life right here, right now as we receive the grace of God through faith in Christ and then walk in the good works that God prepared for us. Here – walking in God's will – is abundant life.

Catuera is a city in Paraguay. In Caterua is a slum community that lives on a garbage dump. In fact, the dump is their source of income as they recycle waste by hand. A while ago a young music conductor started working with kids from the slum community. The problem was, they had no instruments, and couldn't afford them. This little film tells their story...

The church is God's landfill philharmonic...