

Easter 5 – 9am Wesley – 18th May 2014

Theme: 'Living Stones'

Reading: 1 Peter 2: 1-10

Text: '..you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house
.....' 1 Peter 2:5a

Introduction

You have heard in the children's story that I have had a fascination for rocks since I was a boy. Not so much the gemstones but rather more ordinary rocks and rock formations and rock strata. It never ceases to amaze me the variety of rocks and rock structures we have around us, often going unnoticed. Just around the corner from us, on State Circle, we have wonderful rock strata structure showing the layers of rock that have been laid down over the millions of years as secondary sediment and curved by the pressures of the earth's crust, now exposed by the road works showing the rock face.

Up the hill in new Parliament House you have the wonderful marble which bears within it the formations of plant life fossilised within, which adds character to that beautifully cut and polished marble.

In our reading from 1 Peter 2:1-10 we have the wonderful analogy of us being called to be 'living stones' which makes no sense unless you take it in the context. So let us take a closer look at this piece of Scripture.

1 Peter 2:1-10

Peter's letters were written to the early churches, as circular letters, to encourage them in their faith in the onslaught of persecution which was having a dramatic effect on the early Christian communities. In fact Peter was martyred during Nero's reign (54-68AD), probably towards the end of that time. It appears likely that Silas was the one who penned the actual letters, using Peter's words but writing in far better Greek. 1 Peter 5:12 implies this is indeed the case:

"With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

With this little bit of background let us take a closer look at the passage.

This section can be divided up:

Vs 1 – call to holiness by ridding yourself of all deceit, malice, slander and hypocrisy.

Vss 2-3 – speak of being fed spiritually knowing that the Lord is good and wanting more spiritual nourishment.

Vss 4-8 – speak of the Living Stone, rejected by mankind, but chosen by God. "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (or 'cornerstone')" vs 7b

Vss 9-10 – talk of being a community of God's chosen people, literally the people of God. As such we need to live our lives having put to one side the hypocrisy, deceit, malice and slander of the world to be God's people.

From this passage let us look at several of the points raised:

1. Jesus is seen as the cornerstone, the capstone of the building. A 'cornerstone' is not only the stone set at the corner of two intersecting walls (as the name implies) but is one prepared and chosen for its exact 90 degree angle. As such, it is the basis for the construction of the whole building in Jesus' time. If the angle was wrong then the whole building would be flawed and at some stage it would need demolishing. Hence it was of paramount importance to have this stone as perfect as possible. It gives a solid foundation, secure and perfect beginning to all that follows.
2. It is out of Jesus, the perfect cornerstone, that the people are called to be like 'living stones..being built into a spiritual house'. The foundation is Jesus 'and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Life for Christians comes from Jesus.
3. There will be those who reject Jesus, who do not see him as the cornerstone to life. Hence there will be rejection and persecution for those who accept Jesus as the 'precious cornerstone'. "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall". Vs 8a
4. There is the concept also of: "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Vs 9

Hence we see in this passage some core Biblical themes.

Reflection

Years ago I was in Kununurra and visited people I knew in the diamond business. They are part of the Argyle diamond mine trade and he is on the Board. His wife owns and runs one of the diamond distributing shops and outlets and employs diamond cutters. She showed me some rocks that really looked like dirty pebbles. She said, 'These are some uncut diamonds – they look like nothing at all'. Then she brought out a tray with about thirty cut stones on it. She said, 'A few weeks ago these looked like those dirty pebbles I showed you before. Now that they have been cut their prices start at \$55,000.' There were pure white, champagne, pinks and yellow diamonds that all sparkled quite magnificently. The change seemed incredible. The dull and boring stones now had life, lustre and vibrancy as the light shone off the varying cut facets of the diamonds. The transformation seemed incredible and as I reflected back and saw the previous dirty pebbles, this passage talking of 'living stones' took on new meaning.

In a sense we are called to be 'a chip off the old block' and that 'old block' is Jesus who transforms us into something quite beautiful and we become 'living stones'.

What a beautiful metaphor.

However the Acts 7 passage reminds us that rocks can also be pretty ugly and destructive: '....they dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him..'

Conclusion

Today we are reminded to live our lives for Christ, to put aside the things that hinder our faith and to live as 'living stones' bringing glory to God. May our lives sparkle with the faith we have been given. Praise be to God. Amen.