

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the W̱SÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting injustice and asking God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *He is Lord (repeat)*

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Celebrations / Joys & Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.  
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you*

Call to Worship

God is our Rock and our Fortress.

**In God, we find refuge and strength.**

God's house has many dwelling places.

**We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Christ himself has gone to prepare a place for us.

**For us, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.**

So let us worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Steadfast God, you are our refuge in times of trouble, our shelter when we are afraid, and our dwelling place forever. In you alone we place our trust for you set the way before us in Christ Jesus. Your Spirit gives us the courage to follow him and so we offer you our worship and love as the Source of life for the world, as the Son who preached the truth of grace and mercy, and the Spirit who guides us this day and always.

Steadfast God, we confess Jesus as the way, the truth and the life for us, yet we often fail to truly follow him. Too often we go our own way and fall short of your loving purpose for us. Forgive us when we have been too quick to criticize and too slow to offer a helping hand. We pray for your forgiveness and transforming power in our lives. Forgive us for falling short of your purpose for our lives, and give us courage to follow Jesus, who continues to show us the way. **Amen**

Hear the good news! Along with all of God's people throughout the ages, we have this assurance: That neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, not anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is nothing that we can do to separate us from God's powerful love. We are forgiven people. We are resurrection people! Thanks be to God. Amen

➤ *Joyful, joyful we adore you*

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† Prayer for Understanding

**Gracious God, send us your Spirit to guide our understanding as we listen to the Scriptures so that we may follow you more closely, know your truth more fully, and share in your gift of life more abundantly, through Christ, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture **Acts 7: 55-60** [NT 126]

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

**1 Peter 2: 2-10** [NT 233]

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**John 14: 1-14** [NT 108]

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message    ***Easter 5 - Rock On!***



Recently I got to do something I never thought I'd be able to do. I travelled to Italy with my two daughters Rachel and Letha. We visited Rome, Florence and some other smaller places and we saw some astonishing sights. As I prepared this meditation, I couldn't help feeling that my time there was partly doing background research to unpack these scriptures. The scriptures we read today are filled with stones and rocks. Some used to build up and some to kill, as in the stoning of Stephen.

And Italy's ancient history is built on stones. Rome and so many other cities and towns still use the Roman roads made of stone to drive, bike and walk on. And there are no potholes! However, one must be careful where they walk, as it's easy to trip on the odd stone that is uneven. But the stones are solid and have lasted over 2 thousand years. There are mines of marble and quarries of alabaster. These beautiful stones are in buildings and statues, floors, lamps and decorations. The red terra cotta roofs adorn most dwelling places. We stayed in a hotel in Florence that had been a convent in the 1300's, all built of stone as was the tower we climbed to take in the view.

This was a very different kind of rock concert. In Florence we saw Michelangelo's statue of David, the shepherd boy who killed Goliath. It stands 14 feet high and is stunning to look at.

The piece of marble that was used to create this statue had a history. Two other sculptors had had a try at creating the David that the church had requested commissioned. But they each gave up, saying that the marble had too many imperfections to do it justice. At the age of 26 Michelangelo was asked to take this rejected marble and sculpt David. He worked on it from 1501 to 1504. It was so incredible that a committee was gathered including other artists such as Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci to decide where to put it. It was originally going to be placed in a niche high up on the outside of the cathedral in Florence, but they decided to put it in the city square - the piazza - for all to see. A reproduction stands there now and the original is in the Uffizi gallery.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...The passage in 1st Peter is rock solid with stones. Jesus is the living stone, rejected but precious in God's sight. He is the son of God, our Saviour and while he was indeed rejected and crucified-

he rose again on the 3rd day and more than any statue of David, we are transfixed and transformed by him.

See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner', and 'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.'

Cornerstones are more of a ceremonial thing for us, noting the date a building was built, with maybe a dedication on it and so on. But in biblical times a corner stone was crucial. It had to be set right, otherwise the house wouldn't be square or stand the test of time. It created the needed stability for a strong building.

First Peter was written to a suffering people, people who followed the Way, that is, Jesus' followers. For the Jewish people the Temple in Jerusalem was understood to be the site of God's presence. But for those who followed Jesus it was and is different. Jesus is the living cornerstone of the Church. For us, God's presence isn't about a place. God's presence is in the people of God. You and I; we are stones that come together to create and build a place where God is present.

Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I Am there with you(them) (Matt. 18) Salvation is not just an offer to individuals, but it is a call to community. We are stones, gathered together, that are part of a structure built on Christ. And I was reminded on my trip of the variety of stones there is. There is marble and alabaster - smooth to the touch, granite and basalt, limestone, rough, jagged, small, and large. There is room for us all, no matter who we are.

First Peter speaks of a stone that makes them stumble or fall. In Greek, the original language of this letter, the word used is *skandalon* which has two possible meanings. It can be a stumbling block, something to make you fall, or it can be like a bait stick in a trap meant to lure you and catch you up. Jesus was a *skandalon* to many in the Jewish faith. Many were tripped up by who he was and who he proclaimed to be.

But we can be tripped up too by how we understand the church, the body of Christ. Buildings are useful, and as an artist I admit I'm fond of the art inside so many. But the church is not buildings. It is us. You and me. We are the stones, aligned with the cornerstone of Christ, the living rock.

In the story of Stephen, we hear of how he is stoned to death. Do you remember the reason they stoned him? If we back up a bit in the story, Stephen is teaching, preaching that God does not live in houses made with human hands. God can be worshipped anywhere! He quotes Isaiah 66 where God is saying "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord. Or what is the place of my rest. Did not my hand make all these things?" And that was the clincher. Stephen was charged with blasphemy and immediately stoned. While Saul, later known as Paul looked on.

Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on the passage in John that we read today. She writes, "Jesus' followers were a small, persecuted band. Evil and death circled over them like a cloud of patient buzzards." Jesus tells his friends: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*

These words of Jesus' are spoken in a language of love, and of relationship. Jesus said to Thomas, the one who always had the good questions, *'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'*

These are not words meant to deride other religions. They were words of comfort and assurance of their relationship with him. But after the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal and backed by an army these words began to be used for power and eventually colonialism. But these were words about a way of abundant life. The Way.



And The Way makes me think of The Appian Way. This was the oldest Roman Road that went from Rome to the coast where Paul would have landed when he was taken to Rome. He would have walked on that road heading ultimately toward his own death. And Peter, whose name means The Rock, would have walked that road as well. There were 29 roads that fanned out from Rome, but the Appian Way was the first as well as being an engineering feat of its day- hence all roads lead to Rome.

The Appian Way is still there. My daughters and I walked on it, and others drove on it or rode bikes as well. Along the way there are catacombs, sheep farms, ancient memorials and some small churches. But those stones are still there, solid and smooth.

We still are people of The Way, and journeying together, following the One who rolled away the Stone on Easter morning - Even if we feel broken, jagged, smooth or small, rough or rejected, we are the stones that Jesus has gathered together. We are stones - albeit imperfect - but we are aligned with the One true cornerstone who holds us together as one.



When we landed in Rome, and were heading to our hotel, I looked across the countryside and could see the trees that are so unique to that part of Italy. My familiarity with them comes from seeing them in so many paintings. I had to look up what kind of tree they were just out of curiosity. There were several names given for them but the one that stood out was Stone Pines. I laughed and thought. I'm in the right place.

➤ *Christ is made the sure foundation*

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Offering and Prayer     *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*     306

**God of life and love, receive the gifts of our love that we in turn offer to you. May what we bring to you answer the voices who cry out in need. May our gifts sustain your body the church. And may they bring healing and wholeness to feed the bodies, minds and souls of those who cry out for your help. Bless our money, our time, our talents that the world will know your renewing and transforming love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Apostles' Creed

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**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

Invitation to the Table

God's Spirit is approaching – through time, across continents, soaring over creation.  
God's Spirit is speaking – whispering and comforting, roaring and challenging.  
God's Spirit surrounds us – beyond touch, warmly embracing.  
God's Spirit transforms us – making our horizons wider, our faith stronger, our hopes possible.  
Here, now, God's Spirit is working – through bread and wine, through our hands and our lips, all things are made new. And all are welcome. Come to the table and be transformed.

➤ *We are God's people*

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† Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving

God be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is good to give God thanks and praise.**

Living God, we acclaim you, majestic in holiness, worthy of praise, worker of wonders. In the beginning you created the universe. You made the sun and stars above our heads, the earth beneath our feet. You fashioned life in all its myriad forms and shaped from clay the wonder of the human frame. You spoke your word to those whom you had chosen. In disobedience they turned from your commands. You came yourself in Christ, the Word made flesh. You still call your people to repentance to renew their covenant with you, and to prepare for the joyful feast of the Lamb who is slain. By Jesus' suffering and death he defeated the power of death, becoming for us -the source of eternal life. And so, with every generation before us, with all who will come after us, we lift our voices and sing in joyful praise...

*O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!*

Holy and merciful God: in the fullness of time you gave your Son for the life of the world, who, being truly and eternal God, took flesh and became human for us – and for our salvation. Sharing our joy and our sorrow, he healed the sick, and was a friend of sinners. Obeying you – he took up his cross and died that we might live. We praise you that he



overcame death and is risen to rule the world. He is still the friend of sinners. We trust him to overcome every power that can hurt or divide us and believe that when he comes in Glory, we will celebrate victory with him. And so we proclaim together the mystery of our faith:

***Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!  
Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!***

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine, that the bread which we break may be to us a communion in the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless may be a communion in the blood of Christ.

In union with Christ, and the whole church in heaven and on earth we present ourselves to you, O God, to be a living and holy sacrifice. Through Christ, by Christ, with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!  
Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

### Breaking of the Bread / Pouring of the Wine

#### Sharing Bread and Cup

Come – for all things are ready. The gifts of God, for the people of God!

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.*

*If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.*

*We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Both juice and wine are available.*

*Pre-packaged elements are provided on request.*

#### † Prayer after Communion

Lord Jesus Christ, you have nourished us with bread broken and wine poured out to strengthen us for our journey. And you have put your Spirit into our hands to take your peace with us wherever we go. You rise in us in spite of all that challenges us within our own lives and in the world you love. You rise in us to mend our broken hearts and put us back together again so that we can befriend the world, and make peace for all God's people in your name.

Set us free from our fears, our anxieties, our misdirected concerns for our rights, and the burdens we need not carry. Teach us to hear the questions that we have but are afraid to

voice or even consider. Show us the outcast within ourselves... Holy Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness, in words and silence, receive our prayers for others.

In your love and in your power, bring healing; bring peace...

We bring to you those who need your healing touch: for those whose illness is long, painful or difficult to cure...

In your love and in your power, bring healing; bring peace...

We name before you those who are troubled in mind, those who feel trapped, those who have lost hope, and those who are burdened with grief.....

We pray for your church in all places – in troubled and broken countries as well as peaceful ones. We remember those who are running from war and violence and ask that you will protect them. We remember our families and friends and ask you to enfold them with your love. Bless those we name in our hearts before you...

Send us out as your witnesses to share your peace and your grace with hope and humility and for your sake.

God of life and wholeness, hear these our prayers for others and for ourselves... Open our eyes to see the radiance of your glory, and bring us at the last to your everlasting kingdom, where in light undimmed and unending, you are worshipped and adored, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hear us now as we pray in the words that Jesus taught his friends...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven*** (*The Lord's Prayer – no repeats*) **469**

➤ ***You that know the Lord is gracious*** **470**

### Blessing

May the God who knows you better than you know yourself grant you courage to face the unknown without fear. May the God who loves you better than you love yourself grant you the gift of understanding and acceptance. May the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, and the Rock of our salvation uphold you and strengthen you with love, laughter and grace.

➤ ***Jump with joy*** **406**