

A Chip Off the Old Block©

1 Peter 2:1-10

October 9, 2011

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Memory verse: ⁵ *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.*
(NIV)

Even as we realize there is no way to fully bring the experience those of us who attended the retreat had to you, we all expressed a deep desire to share that experience with the rest of the family. Today, we are attempting to do that.

For over a month before the retreat, you heard the story of Jacob several times – Jacob, the son of Isaac, the deceiver who stole his brother's birthright and blessing, who ran from his home to escape his brother's wrath. He ended up sleeping that night on a pillow of stone and dreaming that there was a ladder that extended to and from heaven and God speaking to Jacob, promising him God would go with him wherever he went and would bless him – the same promise given to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. Jacob awoke and turned the stone pillow into an altar that he consecrated with oil, saying that God was in that place!

We began the retreat on Friday evening consecrating the stone pillar that you see under the stained glass window, as a reminder that God was in that place, just as Jacob proclaimed after his dream.

Truly, we did experience God's presence at Echo Grove on our retreat. We experienced God in our conversations, both fun and serious – in our free time - doing crafts, walking, resting – at our meals, nourishing our bodies and fellowshiping together.

In a moment, I'm going to ask some of those who participated on the retreat to share something that meant a lot to them. And it's our hope that, as we share, you might catch a bit of the fun, the dream, the vision from them.

We made use of the technology we had on the weekend. We used appropriate clips as illustrations to what we were discussing. We used DVDs with music and words to old and new hymns. And we used the words to the hymns during our worship on Sunday Morning, as well as images of people around the world sharing in the Lord's Supper.

We have one clip to share with you this morning. It was one the group liked and thought we should share. We were talking about dreams for the future of the church. That sometimes we think we are done; we feel we can't do anymore; we're not able to do much – for whatever reason.

Here is an illustration about some men in Taiwan who have aged. They are friends. They have a history together, memories shared. They have suffered loss. They are old and sick and in grief. They've seen many changes. But see what happens when one decides not to give up, not to stop dreaming!

Clip about "What do People Live For?"

You have a history, memories and dreams together. Even if some of us – like Fred and myself – are new to the church – it is our history, our memories as we become integrated into the church family.

We heard wonderful stories about the church – how people came to help when someone lost a child; we heard about fun stuff on mission trips with youth; the women's group and the men's group and the over 50's group. We heard about fellowship times and games and worship. We heard about your love and the fun you had with different former pastors.

And we dreamed together – about how we would like to see the church look in the future. We talked about church growth and how the church is a vital, fruitful, important church in the community just as it is right now.

I'd like to invite some of you who went on the retreat to take a moment and share with us something you liked.

Time for sharing.

- Stumbling blocks?
- Vespers
- Games and fun in the common room?
- Quiet talks in Dogwood in front of the fire?
- Morning Prayers
- Memories shared
- Food
- Sharing our passions
- The Banner
- The Communion Cloth
- The hayride
- The bonfire entertainment

Whether we have a rock with us as a reminder or not, as long as we are together, we have a constant reminder of God's presence through one another – we who are living stones.

We said our memory verse all weekend together. It was a part of the letter you heard read from 1 Peter 2.

We, the church, are living stones – that is we are the foundation of the church that Jesus established. Paul says in Ephesians that God equips the church with the gifts the Church needs to be exactly what God wants us to be in a particular time. And if you are a Christian, you are not excluded in being given a particular gift or passion. A gift is something you do well, (or you would do well, if you develop it). It is something you really like doing in the church and in the world as a member of God's family.

That means that everyone has a particular passion or gift that goes together with all the other passions we have in the church that make up the congregation here at HPC in the year 2011.

We dreamed about what it would look like if we really built the ministry and mission of the church today with our particular gifts we have today in mind. The question was asked if there is anything we do that doesn't fit that category right now. Are there lots of people trying to do a particular ministry that really doesn't fit their gifts – their passion?

Of course, we all know there are some things that have to be done whether we feel like it or not. But wouldn't it be wonderful to really build the church here as we become fully aware of the true gifts God has given us right now?

That was just the beginning of the dream and the vision. We made no decisions. We wouldn't even attempt to make changes and decisions without all the family having the opportunity to be present.

We will compile all the thoughts and discussions into notes and have a family time sometime in the near future where we can continue to dream together.

One thing that stood out for most of us adults was that our Teens for Christ sat together during the sessions and they came up with some very deep perspectives. One was that they didn't think we should worry so much. That they see us worrying about lots of things and that perhaps we should have a little faith. That's something to keep in mind when we get out of sorts and get overly concerned about issues, don't you think?

The fact is, we are living stones. We are the foundation of the church. We *are* people of faith. On the retreat, we discovered that when we talked about anything meaningful in regards to the church, we talked about the people.

The people – all of you – are the true church. As Peter says – like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The true church is the spiritual house – the people of faith who are alive and at work sharing our passions, our God-given gifts with others. And using those gifts for good is our spiritual sacrifice.

We offer them in our human inadequacy as weak and flawed as we might think they are. But we do it through Christ Jesus. And they are acceptable to God through Jesus, God's Son, who is the first Living Stone. In fact, Jesus is the Cornerstone of the foundation that we build. Without that cornerstone, we are nothing but stumbling blocks.

I love the way Peter ends our passage today. "Once you were not a people, but now you are a people."

Church, let us never forget as we get caught up in the busyness of being the church that we would not be a church at all if it were not for our Cornerstone, our founder, Jesus Christ. It is because of him that we are a people together.

And it is about the people – you and me, and all those before us, and after us – living stones who are loving God with all our hearts and loving each other as we love ourselves. Just as Jesus taught. Jesus our Cornerstone.

Isn't it exciting to look at one another and to see the gift God has given in each person? How might we be re-formed as the church that Christ intends us to be, if we looked at each person with eyes that could see into their hearts and with insight that saw their great talent, their passion for a particular service in the church? And if we rejoiced and encouraged and affirmed each one to use that God-given gift?

Some of you who have been around a while, are pretty familiar with your passion, your particular gift. But some of you may have to do some praying and thinking to know what it is. I say – go with your gut instinct. With what you think you would love. And ask people who know you what they think. Their instincts and insights are probably pretty trustworthy.

My prayer is that we might become more and more "in tune" with our passions, our gifts, and that Holly Presbyterian church will draw in more people with new gifts and we will grow – as a genuine, authentic spiritual house that has living stones for its foundation and of course, always Christ, as the cornerstone.

Yes, I can see - you are definitely a chip off the old block! Thanks be to God.