

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 24 May 2020. Rev David Swales

1 Peter 2.4-10 *Living Stones: God's Building Site.*

It has been strange in recent weeks to walk past building sites and see very little going on. The machinery standing idle, the work unfinished, the building materials piled up, unused.

In our Bible reading, we heard about a building site where construction is in full swing.

As you come to the Lord, the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual temple

I think these are words we need to hear just now: it might even be that we are *better* placed at the moment to understand and accept more deeply what they say.

After all, most weeks I find myself beginning these services by welcoming you to this empty church, and reminding you that the church is not the building: it's you, the people. But maybe, as the weeks of isolation mount up, those words feel to be wearing a bit thin.

Maybe you have, rightly, an instinct that the church is a people coming together – after all, the word the Bible uses for church is the Greek word for a gathering. And so you find yourself asking if the church can really exist in any meaningful sense when its members *can't* gather. Is a virtual church – connected mainly by remote, electronic means, not physically together – actually a church at all? Are we just vainly, and with decreasing enthusiasm, going through the motions: a pale shadow of the real life of God's people?

If we are starting to think that, then we need to revise our understanding of what the church really is: and there's no better place to start than in Peter's description of the church as God's building site.

As you come to the Lord, the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual temple.

It's a marvellous picture. Notice that God's people are not described as a fine, finished project: an impressive temple with all the towers and pillars, the decorations and facilities in place. We're God's building site: His 'work in progress'. Building the church is God's work, not ours. But notice, too, that there's nothing to indicate that God can't continue that work of building in circumstances where we are restricted in what *we* can do. Yes, there are some things which God normally calls us to do as a church which are impossible right now: but ask yourself, what might be the building work – in you, in us – which God can do all the better at this time?

A building site is messy, and not always an easy place to be; but it's also a place of great energy and creativity, a place where things are changing, growing, taking shape. What is God building, changing, creating in our current life as a church? – in the midst of all the mess,

frustration and uncertainty; but also in the midst of new and unusual opportunities and challenges?

Let's go back to that image of those building materials, stacked up, waiting for the work to restart. A familiar feature, of course, is the huge pallets of bricks, or of concrete blocks. The regularity of modern bricks, in size and shape, makes it much easier to build a wall which is true, straight and stable. God, however, doesn't have regular, straight, uniform blocks with which to build. The Living Stones – you and me – which He has to hand are all kinds of awkward shapes, sizes and types. You get a bit nearer to it if you think of an old building like this one, built from stones none of which were exactly the same as another.

Years ago I read a book about the Church entitled *Building with Bananas* – the point being that the church is built from people whose awkward shapes do not make that an easy task – either for God, the master builder, or for you and me who are called to work together with Him.

You might hear that as bad news: wouldn't it be so much easier to build the church if those living stones, you and me, were less awkward; if we were more perfect? How are we ever going to get anywhere with such an odd set of building blocks?

I hear it as good news. Because the truth is that most of us are only too aware of our faults and flaws, our imperfections – and a bit too aware of one another's, too. We know that we are, so to speak, very oddly-shaped stones. We might even have the idea that 'God couldn't use someone like me: to be part of His church you need to be a certain type – and I'm not that type'.

Well, we're all the wrong type: that's why we need God in our lives. But the amazing thing is that He needs us too: He can indeed use us, odd shaped stones that we are, to build His amazing, spiritual temple, to build His church. Of course, He may well have to chip off a corner here, or smooth a jagged edge there – He is, after all, the master builder, and we have to let Him do His work in us, if we are to be the way He wants us. That process may on occasion be painful. But make no mistake, He specialises in working with people like you – and me.

I enjoyed Archbishop Justin's contribution at the beginning of our service. We might imagine that, if anyone is an ideal candidate to be a living stone in God's building, it would be him. But he rightly said that what he is – archbishop, or whatever – matters not at all. What matters is that important decision he once made: to be a follower of Jesus Christ; to build his life on Him.

Because that's the secret to this amazing spiritual temple that God is building; that's why He can build it using such unpromising building blocks as you and me. It's built on Christ – the cornerstone, as Peter says; He is the one who holds the whole building together.

Please, make sure that *your* life is built on Him.

And, together, let's make sure our Church is built on Him.