



EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH, GENEVA

**Sermon for the  
Fifth Sunday of Easter  
10 May 2020**

*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight.*

This Sunday we are given another image of the risen Christ. Last Sunday you will remember that the image was that of Jesus the Good Shepherd. How we loved those cute pictures of sheep and new-born lambs in the fields and Dolly the Eve's role in the Virtual Choir. This week, in contrast, the image is hard and angular: for it is the image of Christ our cornerstone.

Now, don't switch off: there will be a time when you are back in Emmanuel and I will be able to see if you are paying attention or not! You must prepare! Someone sent me a cartoon the other week. The picture showed a father and his eight-year old back in church. When it came to the sermon, the eight-year old snuggled up to his father and whispered: 'Dad, can't you just fast forward the sermon as you do at home?' The need for us confessing our virtual sins has never been greater!

Cast your mind back to childhood. Did you have a set of colored building blocks when you were very young? I did. I used to build them in tall towers. But the trouble was that they had no foundations. The tower would collapse with any sudden movement. And of course, they were perfect for the childhood tantrum: one well aimed kick and there was a feeling of real power in the total destruction. I think that it was for this reason that my wooden building blocks were phased out and replaced with a relatively new invention: Lego! Lego was wonderful! The bricks were chunky; there was a base on which to build and a house or a garage could be built in no time. Furthermore, it was tantrum proof: however hard you tried, the Lego house was remarkable resilient. In building a Lego house, I remember it was the third brick that made the difference: the first two bricks were placed at right angles on the base. Then the third brick was placed on top of these covering the join. This was the cornerstone, giving strength and stability to the whole structure.

The early Christians as they reflected on the death and resurrection of Jesus were deeply attracted to this image of Christ as the cornerstone – the one giving strength and stability to the newly formed church. This was an image that resonated deeply with them. They remembered that story that Jesus had told about the wise man building his house upon the rock: it comes at the very end of the Sermon of the Mount and Jesus says: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock...and

everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand” (Matthew 7:24-27). And that is all he said: it is up to you to choose one or the other. The deep foundations of the love of God in Christ or the shallow, glitzy, superficial alternative self-centered focus on oneself.

These early Christians were drawn particularly to Psalm 118, v. 22-23: “The same stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” As they thought about the life of Jesus and the opposition that was generated against him by the religious authorities leading ultimately to his death on the cross, this made sense. Jesus was like a cornerstone that had been discarded by one set of builders but then God through the resurrection had taken this discarded stone and made it the cornerstone of a new and vibrant faith in God. No wonder they sang out with heartfelt praise: “This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

This image of Christ the cornerstone was all the more powerful when one considers the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 66AD. You will remember that when the disciples came to Jerusalem, they were stunned by the magnificence of the temple. The evangelist Matthew records: “As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down’” (Matthew 24:1-2). Moreover, the disciples began to remember that Jesus had taught them that if the temple was destroyed that Jesus himself would rebuild it in three days. From St John’s Gospel:

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body (John 2:21-22).

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans coupled with the rapidly growing new faith in Jesus Christ the crucified and risen Savior was summed up perfectly, therefore, in the words of the psalmist: “The stone that the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” And to this was added another verse that was found in Isaiah 28:16: “See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.”

When you come to Emmanuel next once the lockdown is lifted, come by the rue de Monthoux and have a look at the corner of the building on the Library side just by the bins. There you will see the cornerstone. It has the dates 1877–1929 in it below the Chi-roi the sign of Christ. 1877 when the church was built and 1929 when the extension was built with the Library, offices, Grande and Petite Salle. It

was from this cornerstone that the walls were built straight in either direction. The cornerstone determines the layout and stability of the whole building.

At this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic, we are invited as we survey the shipwreck of so many nations' economies, to look to Christ our cornerstone. What kind of a world might we envisage building as we move forward? Are we going to be wise and lay strong foundations so that nations work together for the common good rather than indulge in blame games? Are we going to be committed to eradicating poverty and disease by tackling the gross inequality that plagues humanity? Are we prepared to tread the world more lightly? On Thursday the Tribune de Genève reported that all of us in Switzerland has used up a whole year's worth of natural resources by May 8<sup>th</sup>. Does this sound wise to you? Remember the words of Jesus: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock."

Just as the world needs Jesus to be the cornerstone, the sure foundation of mercy, healing and love, so you and I are invited to build our lives on Jesus our cornerstone. It is by doing this that our lives can secure stability and strength. Without this sure anchor, there is a danger that our lives will be all over the place! When we look to Jesus as our cornerstone, then we have the possibility of being the living stones that are mentioned in the reading: of coming alive by being truly ourselves through the grace of God. Michelangelo when asked once about his work as a sculptor, said: "I saw the angel in the marble, and I carved until the angel was set free." It is a wonderful image of what God sees in you.

And so together as the family of Emmanuel, let us be built together in a church whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ. Let us cement together to be strong and stable at this time of great uncertainty. And let us be content with where God wants to place us in the building. When I attended my Methodist secondary school, there was one meditation by Michel Quoist that spoke to me more deeply than any others. It is entitled The Bricklayer:

*The bricklayer laid a brick on a bed of cement,  
Then with a precise stroke of his trowel, spread another layer,  
And without a by-your-leave, laid on another brick,  
The foundations grew visibly,  
The building rose, tall and strong to shelter people,  
I thought, dear Lord, of that brick buried in the darkness at the base of the building.  
No-one sees it, but it accomplishes its task and the other bricks need it.  
Lord, what difference does it make whether I am on the roof-top or in the foundation of your  
building.  
As long as I stand faithfully at the right place.*

Michael Rusk, Rector

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