

Living Stones

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on May 3rd, 2026 – 1 Peter 2:2-10)

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When I was a child, I remember helping my Pa and Dad making besa bricks out of cement which were then built into a wall that was used in our new garage. When that house was sold some thirty years after and renovated, our brick wall remained and became a water feature in the backyard. When I saw that, I was incredibly proud of our work that had stood the test of time.

If you have ever driven the highway from Colac to Warrnambool, you will have driven through an area called the Stony Rises. Here the fences are made of stones, one placed on the other until a sturdy fence is made. As a child I spent a lot of time in the Stony Rises as we had friends who had a farm there. All the fences on their property were made with stones. We used to go rabbiting at night, and as I was quite small I couldn't easily get over the fences without having to be lifted by the adults. I guess they got sick of this, so they used to remove stones so I could climb over. These stone fences were both sturdy and flexible, they were made up of stones of all kinds of shapes and sizes.

The bible has much to say about rocks, stones, cornerstones. God is described as our Rock, the ten commandments were written on stone tablets, Moses strikes the rock and water flows. Peter is called Petra, which means rock. I am sure you can think of other examples as well.

Stones and rocks can be used for good and bad. The examples I have already mentioned were used for good. However, in our first reading today we see stones used for bad, as Stephen is stoned to death. Stoning in Jesus' time was not unusual, remember the time that the woman caught in adultery was about to be stoned until Jesus intervenes and says let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.

As he is stoned, Stephen does not forget his foundation Jesus, he prays that God receive his spirit and then asks that this act is not held against those who are perpetrating it. Forgiveness at the very end, just like Jesus.

Our second reading talks about cornerstones and living stones. A corner stone is like a foundation stone.

Today we also celebrate the Church anniversary. If I was to ask you to find this church's foundation stone you would need to go outside. You would find it says that the stone was put there in 1904 and names who laid it and who the architect of the church building was.

On our church anniversary my thoughts turn to Rev Goble who pastored this church for 37 years from 1895 – 1932, and as you know a statue of him stood on Geelong Road. This life size statue has now been moved to the corner of Droop Street and Ballarat Road. I urge to go and look at it sometime. Rev Goble stands on a stone pedestal, symbolic perhaps of the foundation of Jesus Christ on which his ministry was built, as he became known as the 'Good Samaritan of Footscray'.

In Palestine in Jesus' time houses were and still are made of stone. Cornerstones are really important in the building of these houses, as they are the foundation on which the

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rest of the building is built. It needs to be laid properly, if it is not, then when the next layers of bricks or stones are laid, they will topple.

In our reading from Peter, we see him writing about a cornerstone and living stones. Peter (Petra, the rock) is writing to churches who are experiencing suffering because of their faith in Jesus. He is writing to encourage them. He reminds the people that they are being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation, God's own people who have been called out of darkness into light and have received God's mercy.

Using the metaphor of building he reminds them and us of who we are. Like a temple being built requiring a solid foundation on which stones can be placed to build it up. The people of God, the faith community are built in the same way. They have a solid foundation on which this spiritual house is built, Jesus the Christ. The one who practiced love, forgiveness, care, mercy and peace. That is the foundation on which all they do as faithful people happens. But it is not a static foundation it is a living foundation, a living stone. The community of faith are also called to be living stones, stones that are active not static and staying in one place. Living stones who know they have been called into the light and have received mercy and who practice all that Jesus has taught and shown them.

Like the fences in the Stony Rises, the community of faith will be made up of living stones of all shapes, sizes and colours who together provide structure, protect and are strong yet flexible. Living stones that are diverse, yet all fit together to provide safety, welcome and care.

Like my besa brick wall, these living stones are capable of being transformed into something useful and beautiful.

We the people of God in this place, this household of God are called to continue to be living stones in this place, building on the strong foundation of Jesus and his mercy, offering welcome, hospitality, love, mercy and care to all around us.

Once we were no people, now we are God's people, once we were no body, now we are somebody, now God sees our potential and wants us to continue to let him build us into all we can be.

God's people at Footscray, go out, not as a stumbling block to others, but rather as a good foundation stone for others as you love, care and welcome all. Amen.