

Fifth Sunday of Easter - May 3, 2026

- Acts 7:55-60 - Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 - 1 Peter 2:2-10

“You are living stones”

1. I once visited a rural Kenyan church in the process of being built
 - a. I traveled to Kenya twice, in 1999 and 2000, as part of a Presbytery to Presbytery partnership between rural Illinois and rural Kenya
 - b. Our church in St. Anne had a partner with a parish centered in Isiolo
 - i. The pastor of that Kenyan church, my friend George Muthamia, actually pastored seven or eight small congregations at the same time
 - ii. The Good Shepherd church in Isiolo was the largest of them, and we worshiped there.
 - iii. But he also took me to one of the little churches they were building way out of the way from bigger towns
 - c. Even as the church was under construction, it was already being used.
 - i. The soil all around it was a stubborn soil for farming, because it had so many large stones
 - ii. But if you're building a building, digging out stones is a way to reveal very fertile soil which makes the land productive for farming, and it yields construction materials
 - iii. So imagine a one-room church, a rectangle, with a smooth dirt floor
 - iv. The walls of the church weren't fully built up. They stood probably four feet, because as they gathered big stones, and when they could afford the cement, they built one layer of wall all around the building
 - v. The tin roof was held up not by the walls yet, but by strategically placed wooden poles.
 - vi. Inside, people sat in homemade wooden benches as my friend George preached.
 - d. There was something quite beautiful about that scene for me
 - i. The land had given a fruitful harvest of stones, some as big as a football, so that with the labor of church members the building would slowly take shape
 - ii. And at the same time, the land had given a fruitful harvest of faithful dedicated people who, like those stones, were building a place of welcome, of prayer, and of service.

2. The formation of the early church, as we call the community of believers in the decades after the resurrection of Jesus, went through periods of growth guided by the Spirit
 - a. Our scripture reading today comes from that timeframe, and it offers us several metaphors to make sense of how Jesus leads us and what the spiritual life of those who are to follow him looked like
 - b. The passage refers to followers as spiritual babies longing for their mother's milk, or chosen priests called to lead worship honoring God
 - c. But the image of the living stones is the one that lingers in my mind because I remember that Kenyan church building
 - d. In the time of Jesus, when builders erected a building, they laid a larger, carefully selected cornerstone first, and the whole building grew from there, giving it its direction and singular point of reference.
 - e. So the writer of today's passage affirms that for the community of believers, Jesus is our starting point, that crucial beginning, and what is built from there needs to stay true to Jesus
 - f. And followers of Jesus are a part of what is built, because as the writer continues the metaphor it says those followers are living stones laid in place on the walls made straight by that cornerstone.
 - g. Those living stones join the corner stone, Jesus, to create the building, the community of faith we call Church
3. It's hard to remember that, like the early church, we are still always in the process of building, of being built
 - a. We as a congregation have been here for just over 200 years, and it would be tempting to think: "Oh, this is an established church, it's been built, and we get to enjoy the benefit of its solid heritage."
 - b. But the reality is that we are a church constantly in the process of being built, layer by layer,
 - c. God is never done with the building of this group of followers
 - d. There are new people who become a part of the church family.
 - e. There are new experiences which make all of us grow, sometimes in unexpected ways
 - f. And like that Kenyan church building, the stones didn't come from far.
 - g. They were right there all along; the Spirit brings us together keeping Jesus as our point of reference, and we get to be added layer by layer to this spiritual community we're building
 - h. We grow in faith and wisdom thanks
 - i. to those who gather here in person and online,

- ii. to those have been a part of this congregation for decades,
 - iii. to those whom we welcomed just two weeks ago,
 - iv. to the youth who led us in worship last week,
 - v. to the people who church shop in person or online on a given Sunday
 - i. We're not picking who the living stones are going to be: the Spirit is carefully placing each of us in this joyfully mysterious building process
 - j. We have to stay focused on the direction Jesus points us to based on his teachings and his actions,
 - i. a direction of humble service with our neighbors,
 - ii. of courageous solidarity with the marginalized at our doorstep and across the globe,
 - iii. of prophetic challenge to a controlling empire which tries to manipulate or undermine faithful witness
 - k. The cement that holds us together is our common faith in God, our commitment to justice and love, our fellowship as siblings in this journey.
4. We are living stones in this our beloved community. And in here, it will always a construction zone.

<https://engineerfix.com/what-does-a-cornerstone-do-its-structural-and-symbolic-role/>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-1-peter-22-10-7>