

AUG 27, 2017

PR LABC

Sometimes, there are moments in our lives  
when it feels like we have become unhinged.  
When we feel unstable, or somewhat shaken inside.  
When it feels as though that what is within us,  
is not enough to face what is in front of us, or before us.

These are moments when we have forgotten  
that the ground we rest upon has not moved.  
The rock of our being, the ground of our being, is always with us.  
And in these moments when we are feeling unhinged,  
we are called to remember the rock on which we stand.  
The rock upon whom we are always hinged.

I think this is what the prophet Isaiah is speaking to  
when he addresses the exiled people of God  
who are far from their roots, and far from their home.  
And in this moment when they are feeling unhinged,  
living on a land that is not their ancestral land,  
that is not the land of their rocks of faith  
and are far from the places where God was known to act,  
they are called to remember.

Remember the rocks of their ancestors,  
those ancestors whose same blood still runs through their veins.  
Remember those rocks from whom they have come,  
the people who were called out to know God,  
the people who wandered far from what they understood as home,  
but in their wandering came to understand their home is in God.  
For their home is in the rock  
upon whom they can stand no matter where they were.  
The rock who always looks upon them, who is always with them.

And until then, although their feet are not on the earthly rocks  
they would like to be standing upon,  
the rocks of their faith are with always them,  
in their blood, in their stories, in their faith,  
giving them all the strength that they need.

Who are the rocks in your life?  
How is God a rock for you?  
For whom are you a rock?

Rocks have a great role in our scriptures.  
The word 'rock' is used 142 times in the Bible,  
and most often used to refer to Jesus or to God in general,  
and sometimes used in reference to people.

God is the solid rock in whom we can trust, whose love for us  
is steadfast and even stronger than the earth upon which we stand.

God is a rock of refuge, our rock of salvation,  
who will never be shaken even if the entire world does shake.

God, therefore, has an earthiness,  
and can be trusted to be with us in all of our earthly activities.

And in the Bible, great things happen with rocks.  
Water came to the Israelites who journeyed with Moses  
when he struck a rock.

This morning, we hear how the ancestors of the faith  
are the rocks upon whom the community is built.

Yet rocks can either be a stumbling block or the cornerstone of faith.

Can either lead away from God when disoriented,  
or lead to towards God through grace.

The good news is that the church is built upon Jesus,  
who is the central and stabilizing rock.

So the church, then, is also a rock.

A great big rock made up of many little rocks,  
who are oriented through the grace of Christ Jesus.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus calls Simon, Peter, the rock.  
A name that probably seems to come to him out of nowhere.  
Because it is quite a tall order to be called a rock, especially by Jesus.

Especially a rock that will be part of the foundation  
of something much bigger.

A rock given the authority to bring freedom to others,  
or to keep them bound and imprisoned.

That's a lot of responsibility for a little rock.  
But the thing about little rocks is that it's not up to them  
to be rocks by their own strength.  
It's not up to them to choose how they will be used  
in the foundation of God's church.  
A rock simply has the responsibility to just be.  
To just be the rock that has been freed by grace.

In our gospel this morning, we hear that a little rock in the church  
has a very clear role:  
to share what is known and seen about Jesus.

And each of you, my friends, are little rocks.  
Gathered together to be the foundation of this church.  
Each of you has a unique gift to share  
in the way that you answer Jesus' question:  
*"Who do you say that I am?"*

Each of you has a unique story to share  
in the way that you think about who Jesus is for you,  
in the way that you have known and been freed by grace,  
in the way that you have embodied and shared that grace,  
in the way that you have been inspired and liberated  
to be the rock that you are, the rock that you are freed to be,  
the rock that you are called to be.

Now, no little rock is a perfect rock.  
Peter certainly wasn't.  
He was given his name before he made a lot of mistakes.  
But that doesn't mean that he didn't have immense value in the church.  
For all of the little rocks of faith are always learning  
until they return to their Big Rock.

In this church, the church of Christ Jesus,  
each rock is of significant value,  
and helps to foster the faith of the little rocks that come after you.  
You are not a rock just for you.  
You are a rock because others need you.  
Because God needs you.

I think all too often, we underestimate ourselves.  
We underestimate the ways that God can use our gifts,  
the ways that God can share who Jesus is through us.  
I think that all too often, we are paralyzed by our fear when  
we are too afraid that we will make mistakes as little rocks of faith.  
And yet, Jesus, knowing that Peter would be imperfect,  
still called him out to be a rock of faith on which the church is built.  
Therefore, we are called to trust more in the mercy and grace of God  
at work in us as little rocks than in our own strength to be rocks.

The apostle Paul reminds us that all we have been given  
has been given through grace.  
For all of you little rocks are brought together  
to be used for one purpose in the church:  
to share just how you know and see and love Jesus.

Whether it is through prophecy, through proclaiming what you see.  
Whether it is through ministry, through caring for others.  
Whether it is through teaching, through sharing what you know.  
Whether it is through exhorting, through building others up.  
Whether it is through giving, through sharing what you have.  
Whether it is through leading, through overseeing and organizing.  
Whether it is through compassion, through loving acceptance.  
These are the ways in which we live out our identity  
as little rocks of faith, as the little rocks in the church.

We, as a church of little rocks,  
have been given the keys to open up the hearts  
of those who are imprisoned, of those who long for freedom.  
There are many ways for little rocks to function in the church.  
But they all hinge on how you respond to the question of Jesus:  
*"Who do you say that I am?"*

They all hinge on the ways that Jesus has been known to you.  
Upon the grace that has already been given to you.  
They all hinge upon the cornerstone of our faith,  
the rock upon which we stand, who continues to be revealed to us,  
and who asks us to remember what God has done,  
to remember that in Christ Jesus, we are always hinged.