



Luke 21:5-19  
Sermon  
St. Michael Lutheran Church  
Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007  
Elise Stringer, Faith Formation

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## “Living Stones”

*“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”*

### **A pile of rubble...a pile of stones.**

As the people gaze upon a temple, adorned with beautiful stones; Jesus sees what will soon be a pile of rubble. The precious temple the people cherish, their status, their treasure, their success will soon be piles of broken brick and shattered stones. Standing before this building the people worship, Jesus warns them of what is to come.

### **A pile of rubble...a pile of stones.**

You would have thought I was a young archaeologist. Searching and picking. I used to collect rocks. For some reason I would walk along sidewalks, parking lots and any other place picking out my favorite ones and stuffing them in my pockets. I had a particular interest in shiny black rocks, but I would collect most anything. My mom and dad gave me ziplock bags to store my treasure in. I piled these bags of rocks in my room, sometimes using them for decoration in my pet lizard’s home. I loved rocks.

One year for Christmas my sister gave me a “Rock Tumbler.” Do you remember those? To a six year old it was a magical machine. Together my sister and I would collect dirty old rocks, put them in the red plastic container, add some cream and solution and wait for those dirty old rocks to transform into shiny new stones. Like I said, it was magical. I spent hours tumbling rocks. Watching old rocks become special stones. It was probably one of my favorite things to do and one of my favorite memories of my sister.

**Isn’t it amazing how interesting stones can be?** In today’s Gospel lesson from Luke Jesus’ discourse about tumbling stones is more than a lesson in geology, it is a lesson in life, a lesson in the life of a Disciple of Christ.

Not only will the temple stones tumble and be destroyed, there will be wars, famines, earthquakes, and great signs from heaven, there will be persecutions, hatred and betrayal. There will be pain and suffering in the name of Jesus Christ. These “signs of the times” to come, these signs of the “end times” appear to throw the apostles into a state of fear and shock. I imagine just hearing these words today may stir fear in our hearts and minds.

The apostles want to know when and how these things will happen. They ask Jesus, *“Teacher, when will this be and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”*

In the secret of **our** minds do we also wonder what the signs will be? Do we read these words and think, what will we do when it happens? Do we fear the coming of the end?

Now fear aside and the truth being said haven’t we all seen or experienced these pains—wars, insurrections, betrayal, hatred, famine and earthquakes? Honestly, has there ever been an age without such trial and

turmoil? A century without war? A nation that hasn't tried to bulldoze it's way ahead of others. When have we not been plagued by disease or tossed around by nature? When have we lived in a world without these signs?

Today as a congregation we will bless over 80 shoeboxes we have filled with Christmas gifts for children overseas. We will mail these boxes to children who feel the physical pangs of hunger, who await the end of war, who pray for peace and justice. We will mail these boxes to children who know firsthand the definition of pain and suffering.

So together as a congregation, as a people, we witness to the reality that these signs Jesus is referring to in today's Gospel lesson are signs of today, not just signs of the time to come, or signs of the end time. ***These are the conditions of every time, every place, the conditions of all of God's children.*** Everything Christ has predicted has taken place and is taking place and will continue to take place.

Although it's our human nature to focus on the signs of tragedy and the elements of suffering, to focus on the end, Jesus moves our focus to the time before the final signs, before the end. The Good news of God's Gospel is that Jesus Christ reminds us that as his beloved children, we might suffer, we might experience pain, but in the end not a hair of our head will perish and because of our endurance we will gain our souls. He reminds us that He holds in his hand the beginning and the end, all time, all space, all people.

***"Not one stone will be left upon another."***

After the fear and shock of these "signs" comes the challenge, the Good news and the goodness of God's grace. This Gospel message begins with a lesson in stones and as we come to the end of Jesus' words, I offer a lesson on a different kind of stones- living stones. Jesus says, ***"This will give you an opportunity to testify; and I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."***

After the fear and shock, before the end times, we are blessed with an opportunity to be living witnesses to the hope that God has given us.

1 Peter 2:5 says, ***"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*** We, me, you, each of us are living stones, each day being built into a spiritual house, God's house, a house that cannot be destroyed. A house built of stones chosen, named and claimed by God- a holy priesthood.

We are blessed with the gift of discipleship- a life as living stones- a life of giving all that we have and all that we are to the witness of Jesus Christ. For Jesus says, ***"By your endurance you will gain your souls."*** Disciples of Christ are not exempt from suffering; we are not exempt from war, disease, natural disaster, betrayal or hatred. It is by endurance that we gain our souls; by perseverance through the signs, through the pain, by running the race with faith and courage.

As disciples we are given the gift of words and wisdom from Christ in order to endure the suffering, the signs, to empower and encourage us in our lives as living stones. The words that God is loving, that God is gracious, that God loves us so much that he gave his very life so that we may live. The good news that strengthens our hearts, calms our fears and gives us peace of mind is that God loves us for who we are, his beloved children, created in his image, for life in his kingdom.

***"Living stones, being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood."***

Today we will celebrate 2 milestones; both faith milestones in the life of this congregation and the lives of 6 people in our midst. Jeff Forrester will be baptized in Christ and Andy & Cindy Celinskis, Bill & Barbara Henry and Tony Wintz will become members of St. Michael's.

All six, as Christ's living stones will make promises to live among God's faithful people, to be active members of this Body of Christ at St. Michael's; to hear God's holy word, share in God's holy supper; proclaim God's love in Christ Jesus through lives of service and love to all people, and to work diligently for justice and peace in the world.

And as a congregation, members of the same holy priesthood, we will also make promises to encourage them in their faith journey, to pray for them, support them, and enfold them in the life and love of God through the ministries at St. Michael's. The work of building a holy house, made up of Christ's living stones is not something we can or should do alone. Through the waters of Baptism we are called in community to live lives of discipleship, to face the chaos of life together, to share the burden of pain and suffering, to speak the truth in love, to forgive and be gracious to one another.

***St. Michael Lutheran Church, together, with the newly baptized, the newest members, the oldest members, those in between and those yet to come we are building a holy house, a house of living stones.***

Not stones used to construct a temple, but living stones who witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Living stones whose hope and faith lies in the promise that no matter the sign, no matter the struggle, we are held tightly in the hands of the one who holds all time, space and people, the beginning and the end, the Creator and Redeemer.

***So today in this place, people of God, let us remember and rejoice, renewed by floods of grace, we bear the sign of Jesus Christ, that time cannot erase. Thanks be to God! Amen.***