

SERMON 3rd MAY 2026

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Speak to us now as you have spoken to us throughout the ages. On this glorious Easter, reveal yourself and your will for our lives, that we might live as your Easter people. Amen.

'Come,' wrote Peter in our first reading this morning, 'Come, and let yourselves be built, as living stones, into a spiritual temple...' ¹ Years ago, it was my job to reveal a small part of this spiritual temple of living stones to people who did not know or did not believe that it or they existed.

Years ago, I worked in Palestine and in Israel, and it was my job to take tourists, and pilgrims, and independent travellers, and journalists, and anyone I could get my hands on, and peel their eyes away from looking at the dead stones scattered across that land, and introduce them to the living stones living there.

The living stones of Palestine and Israel were, and still are, the Christians who live there. But, for most visitors, the only stones they see are dead ones; dry, dusty stones, ruined stones, or the stones of churches that mark the places where long ago Christ was born, walked, talked, taught, was crucified, executed, and buried.

People who visit the Holy Land, or, as Christians in the Holy Land call it, the Land of the Holy One, too often go to see the places where the Holy One, Jesus Christ, the foundation stone of our faith, as Peter put it in his letter that we read today, lived his life, endured his crucifixion, and rose again. Sadly, while visitors are visiting those places where long ago Jesus walked, taught, lived and died, those visitors too often ignore the people who are a part of the spiritual temple, built upon the foundation stone of Jesus Christ, and who are today the living stones of the Land of the Holy One.

Today, in Palestine and in Israel, live Christians. They are not recent converts to the faith, a recent addition to the spiritual temple of the Christian faith, an extension, a new build, they are, in fact, the very descendants of the very first Christian converts. They are the descendants of Peter, the author of this letter, himself.

At the very beginning of this letter, we can read that Peter wrote it to, he says, '... God's scattered people who lodge for a while in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...' These are places in Europe and Asia Minor, and it was Peter, along with the other first living stones of the faith, who first took the faith out into the world and converted the people of the world.

Today, if people from the world visit Palestine and Israel, and they are lucky enough to have the opportunity to take a break from looking at dead stones and meet some of the living stones, the members of the Christian community living in Palestine and in Israel, one of the first questions these visitors often ask is, 'When were you converted to Christianity?' The living stones today living in Israel and Palestine answer, 'You didn't convert us, we converted you!'

And, we know this is true because here is Peter's letter as proof. He, a Galilean, and one of the very first people whom Jesus called to follow him, is here writing to people living in

¹ 1 Peter 2: 5

Europe and Asia encouraging them in their newfound faith. And, today, in Galilee in Israel, and in Palestine, Peter's descendants still live.

It is too easy to become entombed, or ossified, or fossilised, by what is past, what is dead and gone, what is ruined, what has turned to dust, at the expense of what still lives, what is present, what is alive and kicking, what is complete, what is beathing. If you ever visit the holy Christian sites, which are found around the Sea of Galilee, or in Jerusalem, or anywhere else in the Land of the Holy One, Christian sites made up of dry, dusty stones, or even beautiful, new stones, you won't encounter the living body of Jesus Christ in these places.

To encounter Jesus Christ alive in the world today, you must meet the Christian people who live in the Land of the Holy One, for they are the living stones of Christ's body, and they are alive on earth today, a part of the spiritual temple that is Christianity alive in the world.

It is important to do meet the Christians, the living stones alive today in Palestine and Israel because they find it very difficult to live. They are for the most part Palestinians, and Palestinians either live in Israel or in territories occupied by Israel. To live, these living stones must endure, struggle, suffer and sacrifice. Just as the foundation stone of our faith, Jesus Christ, was in Peter's words from his letter this morning '...rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God...' so the Christian community in Palestine and Israel often feels rejected; rejected by Israel where they live, or under whose power they live, and rejected by other Christians around the world who often ignore them in favour of dead stones.

To encounter these living stones, a part of the spiritual temple of Christianity across the world is to be reminded and that they are, as Peter wrote, 'precious in the sight of God', and any encounter with these precious people helps them to feel that they are indeed precious in the sight of God. After all, when people spend all their time looking at dead stones and care nothing for you, the living stones, it is difficult to feel that you are loved and cared for, that you are precious in the sight of God.

We, here this morning, are also a part of this spiritual temple that is Christianity alive in the world today. But, we too are easily distracted from paying attention to what is alive now by that which is dead and gone and past. We too can pay more attention to that which has no life at the expense of people who are alive.

Living is not an easy thing to do for Christians living in Palestine or Israel today, but it is also not an easy thing to do for anyone, anywhere, at any stage in life. Living is not easy. That is partly because for something or someone to live, something or someone else must die. Even vegans must kill plants to live. Life depends on death. And, because life comes with death, and death is something we fear, too often we are too desperate to avoid it, and too nostalgic for what is now gone and past, to intrigued by dead stones that we find ourselves unable to live, to truly live, to be living stones.

Life is hard to do. It is hard to do in the very earliest years of life when we depend entirely on other people. It is hard to do in our teenage years of life when we can easily find ourselves lost. It is hard to do in the middle years of life when we must take on the burdens of responsibility, and it is very hard to do in the final years of life when we encounter the mortality of others and are most aware of our own mortality.

But, as hard as life is to live, and as difficult as it is to be aware that to live we must allow other things to die, nevertheless living is what God wants us to do. God wants us to be living stones, not dead stones; life and living is at the core of good news. In this Eastertide season,

we celebrate life and God's mission in the world to resurrect life, to renew life, to put it at the centre of who we are and to use it to confound and defeat death. As Jesus said, in our Gospel reading this morning, "I am the way; I am the truth and I am the life..."²

Much of Peter's letter is about how we should live our lives, and how we should follow Jesus in the way of truth, but first of all and most importantly of all, in this Eastertide season, Peter encourages us to see ourselves as a part of something that is alive, as stones of a living temple. When we do so, just like when we pay attention to those Christians living in the Land of the Holy One rather than those stones littering the Holy Land, we will begin to understand what it means to care for and love each other, and we will begin to understand what it means to put people first and institutions, buildings, countries, religions, temples second. By doing so we will begin to see and begin to feel how we can help other people not to feel rejected, but to discover that they are precious in the sight of God.

For those who have no faith in life, the foundation stone that is Jesus Christ, the living Christ in the world today, will be a stumbling block, but for those of us who can turn away from what is dead and gone, from dead stones, and see life and be living stones, we will discover that we 'are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, and a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.'³

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.

² John 14: 6

³ 1 Peter 2: 9