

Sermon

24 May 2015

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Pentecost & Baptism

I don't remember an awful lot of the stories my history teacher taught me when I was in Primary School in South Africa, but there was this one story of a young girl that touched my heart so much that I can still recall all the detail...

And that is the story of Racheltjie De Beer, or wee Rachel, as she would have been called here! We were taught that during the winter of 1843, a large group of people were trekking up north, looking for a more peaceful place to live. One night, after counting the cattle, they noticed that a calf was missing, so a search party went out looking for it.

In the chaos that followed, Rachel and her 6 year old brother got lost. As the night progressed it got very cold and it started to snow, something that doesn't happen often in South Africa. Realizing that their chances of survival were slim, Rachel found a hollowed out anthill, took off her clothes, put them on her brother and commanded him to get into the anthill. She then lay in front of the opening of the anthill in order to keep out the cold.

The children were found the next morning by the trekking party. Rachel was dead, but her brother had survived.

Rachel's body formed a wall between her brother and the cold, and that saved his life.

In our Reading today we heard that we have to be *living stones* – and that is exactly what Rachel was – a living stone, keeping her brother safe and alive, even though in the end it cost her own life.

What does it mean to be a living stone today? We have a hymn in which we sing (CH4 543:4):

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building [God], sheltering others,

Walls made of living stones.

Jesus is the corner stone of the church – the most important stone in the whole building. In an actual building, the first stone set in the construction of a foundation, is called the corner stone, and it is important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.

So just like an actual corner stone determines where all the other stones should go – our relation to Jesus determines what our positions here on earth should be.

It is God himself who made us, who formed us into the shape he needs us to be, and then puts us where he wants us, because he is the Builder.

And then he cemented us together through the Holy Spirit – so we can stay in position and do what we are supposed to do.

This image of us being living stones, together forming a living church, is one that really speaks to me. “Living stones” was the theme of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that I attended this past week.

This image indicates how very important each one of us is – no matter who we are, what we look like, what we do for a living, where we come from.

Just like every single stone/brick in this church building is important, in order for it to stay standing, we are all important in order for God’s plan to work out. Every single one of us has a role to play – from the tiny baby to the eldest person here.

God masterfully put us together, just like the architect and builders who built this church skillfully put every stone where it was supposed to be, in the end forming the beautiful/very useful building it is.

A building that, even before people enter it, just by being a *church*, already says something about God.

But in order for this building to stand the test of time and fulfil its purpose, a few things needed to happen:

- It had to be built on a proper foundation – our foundation should be the word of God: unfailing, never changing, strong.

- The stones/bricks needed to be just the right shape. No builder just throws random stones together and hopes that his handiwork will turn out to be an amazing structure... No! He plans carefully, which means that sometimes parts of the stones need to be chiseled away so they can become just the right shape.

Just like that God forms us into the people he wants us to be. And if there are certain things that form part of us that shouldn't be part of a Christian's life, he chisels it away, until we are the perfect shape to form part of his church.

This whole process of getting into the right shape to be able to fulfill your role in the church of Christ is probably the hardest of all, because we don't like to change. We don't like letting go of certain things or working hard to achieve others, but if there are things in your life that shouldn't be a part of the life of someone who belongs to God – you need to get rid of it, it's as simple as that. Because why would you deliberately make it hard for God to use you, if that was the reason he made you for in the first place?

- Then there is the cementing together of all the stones/bricks. Because single, loose standing stones/bricks don't form a church. The stones/bricks are laid close to each other and then cemented together. Without cement, a building can easily collapse, and drafts and the rain will be able to seep through to the inside. But if cemented together properly, the stones/bricks will form a building that is warm and cozy on the inside, and it will be able to stand the test of time. Even in the severe weather we sometimes experience in this country!

We need to take each other's hands and live in close relation with one another, in order to together form a living church. Whether we like it or not, we *need* each other. If we want to make a difference in the world we will make so much more of an impact if we do it together.

And we don't have to try and do this all by ourselves. Today we are celebrating Pentecost. God sent us his Spirit to guide us, to help us, to support us, to show us the way to live. All we need to do is to accept this amazing gift in faith. Because then we will be able to *be* who we are supposed to be, and we'll be able to *do* what we are supposed to do.

Although it might sound like a difficult chore to be part of God's living church, it's not. It might be hard work, but it's a privilege and an honour, and if you think about it carefully, you'll realise just how very special you are. God chose *you* to be a brick in his building!

And like I've said before – that is a very important job. With his skillful hands God built you in exactly where he wants you to be – so don't try to wriggle yourself out, because that could cause the whole building to collapse...

(And 4 months ago today,, God decided to extend his house by adding wee And if the 2 of you take each other's hands and always love each other in the way Jesus taught us, your children will always feel safe and in time learn to love the others around them in the same way too.)

The difference between us and actual stones is that we are alive. And we have to keep working at becoming what we are supposed to be.

So if maybe you have a dodgy past, or if your faith is a little shaky at the moment, or if the uncertainty of your future scare you –these things are not set in stone – so to speak! Because through Jesus God made you a new person. And through his Spirit God keeps renewing you. With the help of the Holy Spirit you can change the things you want to change within yourself, and you can strengthen the things that hold you together.

So let's be living stones who stand together to shelter to those who are homeless, literally or spiritually; to keep those warm who are cold, literally or spiritually; and to be a beacon of hope in this sometimes very dark world.

We often say: "If these stones could talk... oh, the stories they would tell!" As living stones, we *can* talk. Let's *tell* the world our stories, so we can make a difference for generations to come.

Amen