

OUR LIVING SACRIFICE
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BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN
CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

Nicknames are fun things. When our daughter, Sarah, was a little baby – just about the same age as our grandson, Teddy is now – 4 months old – when we got in her face and went “Boo – boo – boo – boo – BOO!

She would light up like fireworks and give us a smile the size of her head. So, her dad and I called her “Boo.” I still call her “Boo” now and again. She’s 36 now, but the name connects me

to those early days of innocence, delight, and unconditional love.

Simon, son of Jonah, gets to know Jesus when they’re both grown men, it is in this story today that Jesus first calls Simon, son of Jonah, by the endearing nickname of Rock, or, in Greek, “πέτρα.”

But WHY did Jesus call Simon, son of Jonah, “Rock”?

Look no farther than our reading from Isaiah, where the prophet tells us that Abraham and Sarah, the foundation of all humanity, are the rock and the quarry from which Israel gets its identity, and the Rock of Abraham is the Lord, the God of Israel, who blessed them and made them the beloved people.

With the nickname of “Rock,” Jesus is telling Simon that, like Abraham, he is the foundation of the church that JESUS (not Peter) is building.

The church that Jesus is building is, as I said last week nothing less than an outpost of the kingdom of heaven, an outpost of the the Reign of God right here and right now, where people seek to do God’s will on earth as it is done in heaven and thereby bring a taste of heaven to a world beset by selfishness and all the consequences of that sinful attitude.

Why did Jesus make Simon the Rock, the foundation?

If you ask me, it was a risky choice.

Simon has just finished sinking like a stone in the Sea of Galilee, in just 6 more verses Simon will be arguing with Jesus telling Jesus he should not suffer and die, and then, of course, in ten chapters, to save his own skin, three times Simon will deny he even knows Jesus.

Yet. Simon, this impetuous, often clueless, blockhead

was the first man who called Jesus the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, the Son of the living God.

Jesus makes it clear that Simon did not arrive at this insight through study, intellect, or even rumor: it was given to him by God the Father.

Simon didn’t earn it, or figure it out: it was a gift from the Kingdom of Heaven to a flawed, conflicted, and simple-minded person who quickly demonstrates that he doesn’t have a clue what Jesus’ identity as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, is all about.

I’m pretty sure this cluelessness is why Jesus told Simon and all the others NOT to tell anyone he was the Christ: the teaching in Judaism was that the Christ, the Messiah, was a holy warrior like David who would establish himself on the throne in the palace in Jerusalem and become an earthly King of the world.

Simon and the others could not yet see that Jesus was a very different kind of king.
 At that moment in time, they'd get this Christ business entirely wrong
 if they started speculating about it.

They had to wait until after the cross, the tomb, and the resurrection to get it right.
 Nonetheless, Jesus says he'll build his church on Simon, the blockhead.

This gives me enormous comfort, because I can be a real blockhead, too.

The foundation of the church is not grounded on Simon's achievements,
 but on what God is doing in, with, and through him.

Matthew never explains what the Rock does with those keys,
 but we do know that after the resurrection of Jesus

Peter dedicated his life to proclaiming God's forgiveness, inclusion,
 and hope to a weary world whose inhabitants die like gnats.

And in today's weary world, we are also rocks from God's quarry,
 those whose foundation of faith is not necessarily mighty visions of glory,
 but trust in the promise that God is still active in Creation.

has not left humanity to be buffeted helplessly by hell until time ends.

No, in fact, in Jesus the Christ, hell has met its match.

Hell hasn't stopped sending misery through its gates,

but one day those gates will be crushed by the power of heaven.

In Jesus, God became a human being who lived and died like a gnat swatted down
 by human institutions wielding the swords of selfishness, hate, fear and death.

But the world's hellishness could not withstand the God of light and life:
 Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

God killed death - death no longer had the last word in human life.

This wasn't only for Jesus, though: God has *promised* to bring us
 to that very same resurrected life in and with Jesus.

Not because we deserve it or earn it, but because God's love is stronger than our hate,
 and he will love us and give himself to us forever.

THIS is the Gospel. THIS is the Good News that makes me want to SHOUT –
 to frolick and yell Zip-a-dee-doo-dah and do whatever I can do
 to bring a slice of heaven to a world that endures so much hell.

Y'all already know this! Y'all already know that God is not daunted by our blockheadedness!

Y'all already know that God gives grace and gifts to each one of us.

And even better than that, y'all already know that those gifts all have one purpose:
 to bring the power of heaven into everyday life.

In using these gifts, as Paul says, we are to be a living sacrifice.

Remember, "sacrifice" does NOT mean to suffer, it means "to make holy."

We bless the world in God's power and God's name.

Y'all showed me that you live in this power of being a living sacrifice,
 of priestly service to the world, with that amazing quilt you gave me last week.

Every. Single. One. of the ministry icons on that quilt represents a way
 that y'all make holiness, you show the power of heaven to a weary world.

Just looking at that quilt makes me want to frolic!

Here's what I also know: We see God's plan only in part, and, as Paul warns us,
 we need to stay humble, united, and focused on Christ's mission.

We can't be sure what God has planned for us next.

Remember, Simon could not comprehend that Jesus would suffer and die;
 that's not how Simon thought a powerful God should act.

Of course, Simon was wrong, and God transformed the world
 through a power Simon couldn't imagine until it happened.

That power changed Simon forever.

Just so, this outpost of God's Kingdom here needs to remain nimble and open,
open to new ways for God to act through this parish, to empower it.

This wonderful church family needs to keep making its quilt,
being thankful for what God has enabled us to do so far,
but always poised and ready for the new ways, the new people, and, yes, the new pastor,
that God will give to the Body of Christ in this place
all for God's purpose of making this weary world just a little holier.

Our life is hidden in God; God's creative power of life
is so much more glorious than hell's barren power of death;
God's unconditional love is far more powerful
than our self-serving hate: God is love, and love wins. Love always wins.
One last time together, let's shout out our joy at this Good News:
ZIP-A-DEE-DOO-DAH!

COLLECT OF THE DAY:

O God, with all your faithful followers of every age, we praise you, the rock of our life. Be our strong foundation and form us into the body of your Son, that we may gladly minister to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ISAIAH 51:1-6

Listen to me, you who look for righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry where you were dug. Look to Abraham your ancestor, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. They were alone when I called them, but I blessed them and made them many. The Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her ruins. He will make her desert like Eden and her wilderness like the Lord's garden. Happiness and joy will be found in her—thanks and the sound of singing.

Pay attention to me, my people; listen to me, my nation, for teaching will go out from me, my justice, as a light to the nations. I will quickly bring my victory. My salvation is on its way, and my arm will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me; they wait for my judgment. Look up to the heavens, and gaze at the earth beneath. The heavens will disappear like smoke, the earth will wear out like clothing, and its inhabitants will die like gnats. But my salvation will endure forever, and my righteousness will be unbroken.

PSALM 138

- I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing your praise.
- I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, because of your love and faithfulness;**
- For you have glorified your Name and your word above all things.
- When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me.**
- All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, when they have heard the words of your mouth.
- They will sing of the ways of the LORD, that great is the glory of the LORD.**
- Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; he perceives the haughty from afar.
- Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe;
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me.**
- The LORD will make good his purpose for me;
O LORD, your love endures for ever; do not abandon the works of your hands.

ROMANS 12:1-8

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. We have

different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

MATTHEW 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then Jesus replied, "Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. I tell you that you are Peter. And I'll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won't be able to stand against it. I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven." Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

SERMON HYMN: *God is Love, Let Heaven Adore Him*

BLESSING:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the love of God to you.

The blessing of our Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be upon you now and forever.