

Reflection by Archbishop Anne Germond to Provincial Synod Closing Service

October 14th, 2021

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.” (1. Peter 2.4)

We were each asked to bring a white stone with us into this Synod and on it to write our God given name or the name God is giving us through this time of pandemic through something you have experienced, witnessed or wondered about.

As I think about our pile of stones if we were to place them in an imaginary circle I think some of the names on the stones would be Fear. Anxiety. Isolation. Pain. Loss. Lament. Sorrow. Uncertainty. Unknowing. Waiting. Newness. Birth. Future. Hope.

As I am offering this reflection I invite you either to write your God given name, or the name that God is giving you in this season into the chat box.

(New names like Patience. Courageous. Perseverance appeared in the chat)

Stories of are scattered throughout the Bible – there was the stone Jacob used for a pillow on his journey away from home; the two stone tablets that Moses brought down the mountain containing the words of the Ten Commandments; the stones carried from the Jordan River when the homeless former slaves finally reached the promised land. There were the stones Solomon used to build his magnificent Temple and the few stones that David had in his sling which killed the Giant Goliath.

In the Gospels there are references to stones also – in the wilderness Satan taunts Jesus with these words – *“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread,”* (Matthew 4.3) In John’s Gospel we find Jesus looking at those who were about to throw stones at a woman found in the act of adultery saying to them, *“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”* (John 8.7)

Later on his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus looking at the magnificent buildings his disciples have pointed out to him, remarks, *“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.”* (Mark 13.2)

And then, on the first day of the week, at early dawn, when the women came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared for Jesus dead body they see that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb, and when they enter, they do not find the body of the Lord Jesus where they know it was left on Friday evening.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” Writes the elder presbyter Peter in his pastoral letter to a community in Asia Minor who, because of their conversion to Christ are marginalized and abused. (1 Peter 2. 6)

Stones are scattered throughout the scriptures and our lives. Stones that hurt and maim and kill; stones that build and hold things together. Stones that teach lessons and stones that live.

That's the image of stone that I want us to hold onto as we prepare to take our leave of one another at the end of this Provincial Synod and are sent out into the world in the words of the Baptismal covenant are from that Letter of Peter.

“Come to him, a living stone, chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.” (1 Peter 2: 4)

Can stones live? According to John the Baptist they can. When he preached at the Jordan River he declared, *“I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”* (Matt 3.9)

The ‘stones’ Peter was writing about were people who were trodden underfoot like stones. Their names Crushed. Broken. Cast aside. Rejected.

The elder presbyter Peter reminds them that they are God’s chosen people and that through God’s Spirit they have been made new, called to live their lives faithfully in the time between Christ’s resurrection and Christ’s return. In liminal time. A time characterized by uncertainty, loss, fear, anxiety, waiting, newness, birth, hope. The very time we are living in right now. Yes, they are all of these things but also honoured by God with new names – ‘chosen’, ‘a royal priesthood’, ‘holy’, ‘God’s own’.

Those downtrodden stones did eventually come to life in Asia Minor and we are here today because of their faithful witness in troubled times.

But their being built into that spiritual house was not their own doing, nor is it something that we do for ourselves today– “Let yourselves be built” are the essential words here. As those who have passed through the waters of baptism from death to life know it is all God’s work. Being built into living stones is something that Jesus Christ is doing in and through us. It is something that takes a lifetime as we grow into the full stature of Christ.

What does being a ‘living stone’ look like for us in this liminal season in our lives, in the church and in the world as we wait, sometimes hopefully, often anxiously for life to return to normal, whatever normal is anymore.

Presiding Bishop Michael Currie in his homily to the House of Bishops in The Episcopal Church on September 21st spoke about liminal time by describing a particular space in a church building called the narthex as described to him by his confirmation teacher.

We are all familiar with narthex’s, aren’t we? A gathering place for worshippers before church on a Sunday morning; the place where bulletins are handed out, where mini meetings are held. It’s the place where photos of bishops and clergy in frames smile back

at people as they hurry by and where announcements and lists are pinned onto walls requesting help or offering help, where mission and vision statements are hung and sometimes left unread and not acted upon for decades.

The narthex is the space we have to go through to the sanctuary and to leave afterwards to head home. It's the place where newcomers, strangers or the wanderer wonders whether they will be welcomed, where old friends meet again; and where someone ushers those hanging around in or out or through. It's the inbetween room, like liminal time.

Narthex. Definitely churchlandish!

Let me read Archbishop Currie's words about the narthex....

Well, thinking about that a little more and what Mary Gray-Reeves wrote, it occurred to me that she was right. It is the in-between room, but more than just the in-between room. Narthex is that space that actually is the link between the world and the church. It is that space that actually is the link between the sacred and the profane. It is the space, that in-between space, where existence is actually lived and looked at differently. It may well be that thin place where time and eternity intersect, where divine and human actually meet, where there is a co-mingling between God and God's creation and God's people. Narthex. More than just a physical name, but it may mark the place. A threshold. A crossing. A confusing place. A liminal space. In 2016 before the pandemic, Richard Rohr wrote this about narthex. Actually, he was talking about liminal space.

He said, "We too often remain trapped in what we call normalcy — 'the way things are.' Life then revolves around problem-solving, fixing, explaining, and taking sides with winners and losers . . . To get out of this unending cycle, we have to allow ourselves to be drawn into sacred space, into liminality. All transformation takes place here. We have to allow ourselves to be drawn out of 'business as usual' and remain patiently on the 'threshold.' The limen, in Latin, the betwixt and between, the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone our old world is left behind. There alone we meet the new existence of which we are not yet sure. It's a good place, for there alone genuine newness begins. It is the realm where God can get at us because our false certitudes are finally out of the way. This is the sacred space where the old world falls apart and a bigger new world is revealed. It is the doctor's waiting room. And our call is to wait on the divine physician." (partial paraphrase)

Like the first community the elder presbyter Peter wrote to and the community of the beloved that the elder John wrote to who knew what it was to live in liminal time, we the living stones of this Provincial Synod ought to take another look at the narthex and befriend its space, learn its lessons as the old world falls away and the new bigger world is

revealed. It is in this narthex space of our lives that we are being formed and transformed. This is none other than God's holy time, Kairos time.

And we, the living stones, God's holy people. Named. Beloved. Chosen for such a time as this by the One who is even now making all things new.

As we continue to live in the narthex in this inbetween time let us wait upon the Divine Physician to use us to be instruments of healing, grace and love.

We add the name 'Trust' believing that we are not alone, that God is always with us.

Genesis 28.15-16

And God said:

Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!”¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”