

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
September 25, 2016  
John Crosby  
60<sup>th</sup> Celebration  
Ephesians 2:8-10, 19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-8**

[Missions video shown prior to start of sermon about Brighton, a Zambian orphan who became a pastor and works now to make a good education possible for all Zambian children. Link: <https://livestream.com/cpc/events/6388257/videos/136887528>]

That's why we're here. That's why God brought us to the rich suburbs of Minneapolis, together on this little corner...for that. So that Brighton's look alikes: four-year-olds, and fourteen-year-olds, and twenty-four-year-olds, here, could believe that in this big world, God saw them and loved them. And loved them enough that he was letting us be an instrument around the world, so that Brightons of all ages, in all places, might believe that there is a God and that God loves them. And that's why we believe that these 60 years are a prelude to the great things that God has for us ahead. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, for us 60 years is a lifetime. It's a long, long, long time. But for you, the God for whom 1000 years are a watch in the night, 60 years are the blink of an eye. I pray God, that just as you have spoken so often here and sent us out there, you would speak this morning here, and send us out there. By Your great word. Amen.

Frederick Buechner is one of my heroes. He is a Presbyterian pastor, but his ministry is not in a church, it's in books. He's an author; he is a multiple Pulitzer Prize nominated author of all kinds of literature. But, he doesn't get to preach a lot, and so one time he was asked to come and speak to a church in New England—in Rupert, Vermont. This beautiful, little Congregational church was celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They asked Buechner to come, and this is how he started his message:

Happy Birthday! Happy Birthday to this old church, which was organized two hundred years ago, the day before yesterday, with seven members and a pastor who had the very unpromising name of Increase Graves.

We got lucky, Roger!

Happy Birthday to this old building, which has seen howling blizzards and scorching summer days, even before the road that stands on it ever thought of being paved, when the air was thick with horses' hoofs and wagon wheels. Happy Birthday, because more than an organization, more than a building, a church is the people, who come to pray, and sing, and fidget, and dream—to shed a tear if some word strikes the heart, to try to keep a straight face if the

soloist strikes a sour note, or somebody's hearing aid keeps buzzing, or somebody's cell phone goes off. So Happy Birthday!

That's a great tone that Buechner set. And it is true, right here, too. Since 1956, people have been fighting construction traffic on Normandale. It's the truth. Long before it became Route 100, they came here the way that you and I got here this morning--men and women who grew up in the Depression, and fought in the Second World War, and widows of those who didn't come back from Korea and Viet Nam and the Middle East. Since the very first steeple went up, we have seen a battle for human rights and civil rights. We have watched a man on the moon. The second steeple was put up in the midst of the Cold War and it saw the fall of the Berlin Wall. And the third steeple was put up in time to see the fall of the towers, and new things that make people afraid and wonder about God. Sixty years of students and executives, of grandmas and visitors. Old men and old women with most of their life behind them, kids and young men and young women with most of their lives ahead of them, entered this building just the way that you and I did just a few moments ago because of the one thing that they have in common.

So Happy Birthday to all of you—who listened to some sermons, and dozed through some sermons, and doing all the other things that make us a church and make us human. And before you finish, you have to say, “Happy Birthday to you, Jesus.” I guess it's important to say that, because before this was a Presbyterian church, before this was your church, or Roger's church, or my church, before it was anybody's church, it was Jesus' church. The name, Christ Presbyterian Church, was chosen deliberately to put the most important thing first. The Word, the Word became flesh—Christ. If it had not been for Jesus, who knows what other kind of building might have stood on this corner. Who knows what kind of honest work that old Increase Graves might have gotten back then, or Roger Anderson might have had? Who knows where you and I might be today? So what does it mean, on the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of this church, to say that this is Jesus' church? It's hard to describe; it really is. The first two people who tried the most to describe who Jesus was, what he did, and what his followers were about, were the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul. They were so, so different, and their words sound very different, even talking about Jesus. Paul would have been a Harvard-trained philosophy lawyer today, and he sounded like it when he talked to the church in Ephesus. He said this:

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. [Ephesians 2:8-10]

Christ himself has brought peace to us. By his death on the cross, Jesus put our hostility to death. That sounds like it could be the intellectual voice of our day. And it doesn't sound like the apostle Peter at all. If Paul is Harvard, then Peter is blue-collar. He's a fisherman to his roots, and every time he talks about Jesus, it's all about his personal encounter with the man who ruined his life. The man who changed his life.

When he sees his fishing boat miraculously overflowing with fish that very first day, he runs to the shore and throws himself at Jesus' knees and he says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" [Luke 5:8] And for the rest of his life it's *come here Jesus, come here, come here. Get away Jesus, get away, get away, get away. Come here, come here, get away, get away...*

Harvard educated lawyer, blue-collar fisherman, same Jesus. So how can they sound like exactly the same person? And they do. This passage right here is Paul, writing to the Ephesians:

God is building a home. Regardless of how we got here, God is using all of us in what he is building. He is using the apostles and the prophets for the foundation, and now he's using you, fitting you together brick by brick, stone by stone, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together.  
[Ephesians 2:19-22 as paraphrased by John Crosby]

I swear I'm not listening to Paul. I'm listening to Peter, because this is how Peter described it in his first letter:

So you are coming to Christ who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him, you too are becoming living stones and you are being built into a spiritual house. [1 Peter 2:4-5 as paraphrased by John Crosby]

Same language, two different guys, hundreds of miles apart, separated by culture. I think they got that phrase, that image, from some early song of the church, some early confession—and they both used the same thing. Peter is quoting Isaiah:

So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. [Isaiah 28:16]

That's the Old Testament longing for the Messiah to come, for Jesus. And then he says this:

<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, <sup>8</sup> and, A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.  
[1 Peter 2:7-8]

Jesus is that which around everything revolves. Jesus is the cornerstone, not just of the church, He is the cornerstone of human life on this planet; He is the cornerstone of human life on planet earth. Jesus is the cornerstone in the business of producing living stones.

Now next week our new pastor, Jake, is going to talk about how that happens in a human life. He's going to talk about Peter, Peter "the rock", who was really Peter the "rockhead". But Peter "the rock" turns into a living stone that shares life. He's going to talk about how that can happen to you, or to someone that you love. But what I want to talk about today is, how does God, how does Jesus, turn a church of stone—this big brick church—how does he turn a church of stone into a living stone, one person at a time? Clearly, living stones are formed when you put your heart on the path that Jesus walks. And if you follow Him, Jesus takes us to the kingdom of the living stones. And on the way, He shows us real life, hard life, difficult life, but life that spoils you for the shallow stuff of our culture. He's turning you into a living stone. And then the text says that when we wander from Jesus—and we all do—when we disbelieve that he is the cornerstone, when we disobey the cornerstone, Jesus says that people stumble over him, and they find that God brings even dead people back to the way of life.

All this week I've been sitting with this image, the image of cornerstones, but I've been contrasting in my brain the cornerstone that you see in a building and the gravestones that you see in cemeteries. Both of them have dates on them and names on them, your dates, your name, but they are different. Gravestones point to the end, but cornerstones point to our hope for a new beginning. They are the foundation of a new life. Let me ask you, are you living in the hope of the future, or are you afraid of how the story ends? It affects how you live. Gravestones talk about the past, but cornerstones are about the future. Jesus wants to change your future right now, this morning! And He wants to change our future as a people.

Jesus the cornerstone keeps prodding people to do things they would rather not do. Francis of Assisi gives up his possessions, Saint Augustine gives up his mistress, John Newton gives up his slaves, Father Damien gives up his health and becomes a leper. And at 70<sup>th</sup> and 100, the same thing happens. Jesus gives Jim the help that lets him give up alcohol. Carol is freed, by Jesus, from the hate of the person who sexually abused her. Jesus sets loose young Greg from an all too common addiction to pornography. And 90-year-old Dorothy becomes fearless, and starts to teach immigrant kids how to speak English. When Jesus becomes the cornerstone of a life—your life, my life—when Jesus becomes the cornerstone, it doesn't matter how young you are or how old you are, we become living stones. On their birthday every church should ask, "Is Jesus our cornerstone, or is he just one of the bricks in the wall? Is He just one of the things that we talk about? Is He our first thought, or our afterthought?" Because there is a lot of religion going on that is asking Jesus to bless the American dream: *Jesus, please see this my way.* Is He our first thought or our afterthought? When Jesus is the cornerstone of your life, He creates a new building. He creates a palace, not just fit for a king, but a palace designed for a child. Long before Walt Disney built the Magic Kingdom, little children were coming to Jesus. And as Jesus' followers became living stones, they went out and they pulled unwanted children literally off the garbage dumps. They saved the children.

Today, Jesus has living stones at CPC that are reaching out to love little boys and little girls and young women who have become victims of the sex trade. People at CPC are

using their skills as lawyers to get a home back for widows who have been pushed off of their land. Many of you are living stones and you are tutoring kids and showing them there is a different life; someone cares. And when racial tension flares up here, young adults from The Table go downtown. They live in the tension and they weep with those who weep. And they try to love both the police and the community in pain. When Jesus is our cornerstone, we do not sit in the pew. At the end of this text it says that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone that holds all the parts together.

So as we celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup>, is it more than a happy party, or are you actually going to be united with somebody else in the body today? As we go out and have Famous Dave's, would you at least sit at a table where you ask somebody else their name and say *what's your story?*

Where are you on the journey? How has God loved you? Are we united with others in Christ, building something here? Who is missing from Jesus' birthday party that should be here next week, or next month? Who does Jesus want to love? Does our faith usually feel like a great big party, filled with joy, so that when you drive by and hear the music you think *Oh, they're having a good time!* Or, do people stumble over us? We say they're stumbling over Jesus—they're not—they are stumbling over us because they feel judged by us, and so they feel judged by Jesus. Tim Keller says it right. He says: "Jesus always goes face-to-face for conviction and conversion, and never for condemnation or coercion." I love that phrase. Jesus goes face-to-face for conviction and conversion, and never for condemnation or coercion. When people feel loved, they feel drawn in; they feel safe. Then, they can see Jesus.

We have celebrated so many times and in so many ways over these last 60 years at CPC, it's a joy to do that! And whether it's Rich leading the charge, or Roger jumping up and down in celebration, it is a joy to point people to Jesus. That's what I think Frederick Buechner was trying to do with that church so long ago—200 years old. This is how he finishes. He says: "In the year 1831, this church was repaired and several new additions were made. One of them was a new steeple with a bell, and once it was set in place, apparently an extraordinary event took place. 'When the steeple was added', the local newspaper wrote, 'Limon Woodard stood on his head in the belfry with his feet toward heaven.'" That's the only thing we know about Limon Woodard, but it's enough. I love that! It's crazy, it's risky, it's not New England practical, it's not Presbyterian dignified. It puts the whole idea that you're supposed to be solemn in church upside down...on its head. It's the joyous faith of a man who wasn't afraid to be a child of the King.

If the Lord really is our cornerstone, then everything goes upside down. Being successful gets turned upside down, people and churches. If you stand on your head, then losing becomes finding and weeping becomes laughing. The last become first, and the weak become strong. The guilty receive mercy, and the self-righteous are sent away ashamed. Instead of life being killed by death, death is swallowed up by eternal life—real life, abundant life, starting right now life. And there is no end. And if the Lord is the host at the great feast of heaven, then our feet rest on the table of heaven and Jesus is the cornerstone.

There's so much to be done, so much to be done together here in the next 60 years. We have to help bear each other's burdens, we have to pray for each other, we have to nourish each other, we have to weep with one another, and rejoice with each other and give hope. We get to worship together. We have to teach each other Jesus' words of mercy out of the Scriptures. And we need to show the mercy and justice of God especially to those who feel lost and left behind. We have to love each other, just the way Jesus does.

So on this birthday, let's not forget that it turns people upside down. We need people who join this man up in the belfry with their feet toward heaven, because heaven is where we're heading. That's faith. That's faith—it's a little crazy, it's a little risky. It will make tongues wag and it will make heads spin. It brings our deepest joy and our highest hope because Jesus is our cornerstone. Sixty years—a very good beginning.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that we are just the people trying to get our balance upside down in the belfry, pointing toward Jesus. And I pray, Lord Jesus, that when we fall down, You will pick us up and put us with the others. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*