



'Worship at home' Sunday August 27th 2023

*Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our
salvation. Let us come before him with
thanksgiving. Psalm 95:1,2a*



We come to worship God, who we find in the holy spaces and the ordinary places of our lives, sometimes in unexpected ways. We are reminded that Christ is the foundation of our lives, and our church, and as you come to worship today, you are invited to **find a rock/stone** to reflect on.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we come to worship, to find strength, and to ground our whole being in you. Continue to lead and guide us as you shape us as your people. Amen



Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to

you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

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Hold your rock in your hand. Feel how hard and solid it is.

We think of rocks as sturdy, strong and stable. The name 'Peter' comes from the Greek word *petros*, meaning rock. It was an uncommon name in Jesus' times, however in Greek literature, *petros* was a symbol for firmness and strength. Rocks are used as a firm basis on which to build structures, including buildings and churches. They are foundations which give strength and stability.

*...the LORD has become my fortress, and my God
the rock in whom I take refuge. Psalm 94:22*

In what ways do you experience God as your rock, giving strength and stability to your life?

In this passage, it seems that Jesus names Simon as Peter, the rock, who will be the foundation on which the church would be built. Our image of Peter as portrayed in the Scriptures is not always that of a strong and stable rock. Peter more often seems like a pebble that might get caught in one's shoe or washed away downstream. He is impulsive, changeable and unpredictable.

Take a look at your rock.

Is it smooth, or are there rough edges?

What colours can you see?

Where are the imperfections?



Peter had his imperfections. However, Christ's church is built with imperfect pebbles like Peter, you and me. Somehow, Christ gathers us up and cements us together, like concrete, to become a strong foundation of witness and love.

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans
but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living
stones, are being built into a spiritual house
to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5 2*



Jesus spoke very little about the 'church'. The Greek word used here, *ecclesia*, is only used twice, both times in Matthew's gospel. It seemed to refer to a gathering of people who committed to living God's ways, in faith. In those early Christian times, after Jesus' death and resurrection, there was no church structure of Congregations, Presbyteries and Synods as we know now. God's people came together to worship, pray, discuss, discern and share meals and even their belongings with each other and with those outside of their community, without all the trappings of tradition and process and structure and property that we associate with 'church'. They were a group of people focussed on telling the good news story of Christ and exploring how they might live their lives in response.

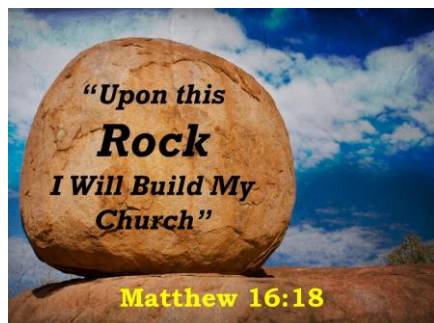
What do you see as the foundation of our church today?

In what ways do our traditions and structure and property help us to be God's church today?

In what ways do they hinder?

Over the past 50 years or so, and noticeably over the past 3 years, some of the traditions and processes of our churches have changed. Worship might now occur around tables, in pubs, or outside. Songs and the style of music has changed, many services are interactive, and less formal. The emphasis of worship, discipleship, and mission, have changed, as the expectations and priorities of our society change. We are being challenged to find new ways of being church, of witnessing the good news of Christ and engaging with those around us.

As God's people we are bound together and united in Christ, and all the storms of our lives and our world, all the political



conflicts, financial upheavals, and physical or medical crises will not overcome. Christ's church is built on a firm foundation. Individuals may come and go, congregations wax and wane, traditions and processes and structures and property change over time, but this is Christ's church and we are God's people.

"But what about you?"
Jesus asked.
"Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered,
"You are the Messiah,
the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:15-16

**On what/who is your
congregation
or faith community based?**
What/who gives your identity?
**When things change,
what/who do you hold on to?**
"Who do you say I am?"
**How would you respond to
this question?**

In the end, this is the basis for our faith, and the foundation for our church. As the world around us changes, bringing change to our churches, we rely not on church traditions and structures and buildings, but on our confession of Christ Jesus as Messiah, whose saving work continues through the Holy Spirit. Times of change bring new opportunities, as God's purposes are worked out in us. Together, we are Christ's church, which in the end will not be overcome.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. Ephesians 2:19-20

**"Christianity has
at its foundation
not a doctrine,
or a body of truth,
but a person."**

Charles Price
Matthew: Can Anything Good
Come Out of Nazareth?



Closing prayer: Hold your rock in your hand as you pray for yourself, the church, the world, and people and situations you hold concern for. Pray for the strength and stability that comes from trusting in Christ as the firm foundation for our lives.