



'Worship at home' Sunday September 3rd 2023

*Turn to Yahweh - to God's strength,
and seek God's presence constantly. Psalm 105:4*

We set aside this time to worship God,
the source and ground of our being.
You are invited to bring **a small stone or rock**,
perhaps the one you used in worship last week,
to reflect on God as your firm foundation.



Rocks are solid, strong and stable, and there are a number of biblical images of God as rock, fortress, and firm foundation. We find strength and stability as we ground our lives in God.

In Matthew's gospel, we hear of the disciple Simon being named by Jesus as 'Peter', meaning rock, providing the foundation of the ongoing church. In this reading, however, Peter, the firm and solid rock, becomes a stumbling block.

Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus

turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever 1

loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he

will reward each person according to what they have done. "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

New International Version

Peter was perhaps well meaning. In an attempt to support and encourage Jesus, he protested against Jesus' predictions of his own death. Jesus had become known as a good man, a great teacher, a powerful preacher and healer. Peter had just affirmed Jesus as Christ, the Messiah; the One who had come to save and redeem the Israelite people from the oppression of the Romans. Surely there was going to be a mighty war, and Jesus would win; not suffering and death such as Jesus was describing! "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"

Our ways are not Christ's ways. When we would seek power and authority, Jesus advocates forgiveness and grace. When we might rebel and lash out, Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek. When we try to justify our own righteousness, Jesus reminds us to remove the plank from our eye. Just when we think we are achieving success, Jesus admonishes us for being distracted from the real purpose. We are instructed to deny ourselves and take up our cross in order to follow.

Take your rock and gently toss it between your hands, or roll it across your lap, as you prayerfully reflect on the following questions.

When has something you thought was solid and secure become a stumbling block that distracted you or tripped you up?



How might you leave behind your own distractions in order to focus on “the concerns of God”?

What might that require of you?



We are called to live in ways that run counter to our world's expectations. Sometimes, that means letting go of the stumbling blocks: our expectations, our pride, our anger or resentment, our disappointment, our success. Often it is not until we are able to deny those things we hold to be important that we know the fullness of new life in Christ. We leave behind these stumbling blocks and embrace new ways of being and doing. We find ourselves standing, firm and secure, on the solid foundation of God's kingdom of love. Then we are enabled to live out the vision given by Paul in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 12:9-21

Love from the centre of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Don't burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along

with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody. Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Love
is a verb
without action it is
merely a **Word**

This is an extensive list, and when we make our relationship with Christ the solid foundation of our lives, this is how we are called to live, in love.

You might like to rewrite this list for yourself, making note of which you embrace easily, and which you find more difficult.



Prayerfully reflect on your list, taking time over those which catch your attention.

Ask God to lead you as you commit again to following Christ's way of love.

This passage from Romans encourages us to live in love with others. We are a community of God's people, called to care for each other with compassion. **Pray for your community, your church, and the wider world.**



Merciful God, help us to turn away from things that do not lead to life--from attitudes and actions that get in the way of our relationship with you and distract us from hearing your voice and doing your will. Open our eyes and ears to your presence and your call. Give us courage to take up our cross and follow where you lead, even if the path is uncertain or leads in unexpected directions. For you alone are God, and we are your people. Take our lives, and use us to your glory. Amen.

Closing

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour everyone;

love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.