

Sermon Mother's Day 2020

Message Part 1. Laying the Foundation

Recently I was watching a programme on TV with my family, perhaps you've seen it, LEGO Masters! On the show teams of two compete against other teams to try and build the best LEGO creation based on the theme for that episode. Now if you're an amateur Lego Master you will know, usually a really important part of Lego building is to make it strong. Except for this episode I was watching. The rules for winning that day was to make the Lego that would create the best explosion when they blew it up! To make it interesting different groups had different explosives to blow up their Lego, some had water, others chalk, glitter even slime! I'm not sure if you saw the show, but if you did, maybe you heard one of the contestants share what they thought was the secret to getting the best explosion. They thought the trick was to not build the Lego very strong, to just push it together softly, so it was only just connected and to leave gaps where you would normally make it solid. It was really cool to watch what happened when they blew up the Lego. Most of the Lego went flying through the air and made a big mess. But there were some parts of the Lego that didn't move at all. Those parts were built strong and stayed together, even when the explosion made all the other pieces break apart.



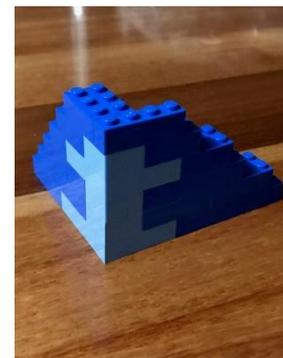
<https://9now.nine.com.au/lego-masters/>

It made me think of our Bible reading for today from 1 Peter 2:2-10 that Opal will read to us soon.



You can see this lego I built. I wonder if you think it is very strong? Opps! I guess it wasn't very strong at all was it. It's fallen to pieces and I hardly touched it. Oh dear!

I wonder what you think of this one? Do you think it might be stronger? It certainly feels or solid. Let's look at it and see why it might be stronger than the green one. The base is really strong and the pieces are all locked together tightly. It's not falling apart at all.



In the Bible it talks about Jesus as the precious cornerstone, the strong foundation. As people who believe in Jesus, we are all the parts built around the strong foundation (just like these blue parts) and we help to make up the church. But we can't do it by ourselves. We need to build on God – on His love and on His word in the Bible, and that helps us to be strong. This helps us praise God and share His light with other people.

I wonder if sometime today, if you have some Lego at home, if you might like to build something that has a really strong foundation. It can remind you of how we should build our lives on Jesus the strong foundation.

Message Part 2 – Nourishment and a Strong Foundation

There's something special about seeing a newborn baby being fed. The precious little one is completely reliant on it's caregiver for it's nourishment. They have no capacity to just pop over to the fridge and get some food or pop the kettle on and brew a cup of tea or coffee.

It's over 14 years since I first became a mother and began feeding my own newborn. (A baby certainly changes your perspective on some of the biblical stories). I recall watching my mother, many years prior feeding my younger siblings. One memory is particularly strong in my mind. My 1st born was not a very settled baby, craving, he would frequently cry out for more. As his mother I would do the best to provide the best I could for him. Do we cry out to God when we need sustenance?

When we call out to God, He feeds us, by giving us good nourishing food in His word. When we taste the goodness of the truth of the gospel, we want more. God's word can sustain us, like it did for the exiles who were recipients of Peter's letter in Asia Minor as they faced uncertainty and

Unlike Corinthians, Thessalonians and many other books of the New Testament with a very specific audience, Peter's letter we read today is more general. It's widely viewed as an attempt to address the needs arising within the range of Christian communities who are struggling to embrace and live out the message of the gospel in their lives. Peter's writings originally to communities throughout Asia Minor, what is modern day Turkey, continue to be applicable to us in our communities as we grapple with what it looks like to live out the gospel in 2020. His letter brings a different perspective to that of many of the letters of the New Testament written by Paul. I like the way Craig Blomfield highlights the theological shift occurring as Peter addresses "the church of Jesus Christ of whatever ethnic composition"*, much like our modern day multicultural church, both here in Blacktown, and around the world. Christ's gospel retains its relevance for the diverse modern day Christian Church.

Peter writes not with a solution to the suffering of God's people, rather with an encouragement of how to relate to the world they live in while remaining true to the values of the gospel and God's plan.

Peter hints at the likelihood of suffering amongst Christians. As Jesus' example clearly demonstrates, suffering is not always a sign that Christians have failed to follow God's will. Rather as Achtemeir, Green and Thompson suggest, we are reminded of "the immediate relevance of the gospel to the condition of ... readers" ** We can expect to experience various forms of suffering during our lifetime. It is comforting to know God's word is relevant for us today on Mother's Day in 2020 just as it was to Peter's readers in Asia Minor.

Perhaps we can relate to the exiles Peter originally wrote to in biblical times. They were social misfits trying to balance their faith with the culture of the day. If we stop and think about it we all are like strangers in a foreign land. We suffer in our own ways and we await our eternal home with Christ. Yet that is not an excuse to sit idle or wallow in sadness when life is hard, or not as we hoped.

Chapter 2 verses 1-10 has a focus on how we can grow in our Christian living particularly, by forming strong Christian communities. Just like we would take off dirty clothes after a day of work, or being out in the garden or physical exercise, we should remove the elements of our life that make us unclean in God's eyes. Many such elements are on a personal level, yet also impact on our Christian community. You might find it helpful to read over the behaviours listed in the first verse of chapter 2 to see if they prompt any behaviours which may apply to you.

Rather than pulling down and destroying through our words and actions, the Bible calls us to cease the unhelpful, even harmful behaviours that might pull down our church and instead focus on building a solid community.

Peter uses milk as a positive and a nourishing symbol to remind us that as believers we need pure nourishment throughout our lives. This in turn, helps build our Christian community. Where do we find that pure nourishment, that spiritual milk? In the word of God!

Jesus' suffering and death demonstrates His power to restore those who have gone astray. Similarly our Christ-like behaviour has the potential to shine God's Glory into the lives of people in our broader communities, that they too might receive God's mercy.

It is as each of us as individuals ('Living Stones' the passage calls us) feeding on God's word come together and build around the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, that our community begins to truly flourish. Together as chosen people of God we can demonstrate God's Grace to a fallen world.

That might all be well and good when we can actually meet together. Thankfully the time will come when we can again gather together. However right now many of us are apart. How do we build each other when were physically distant?

Firstly, may I suggest much of what Peter is calling us to do is actually on a personal level; making now the perfect time to meditate and reflect on God's word and listen to the conviction of The Holy Spirit in our personal life. Perhaps there's some things you need to confess or seek forgiveness for? What behaviours might God be calling you to change for your benefit and that of The Christian community?

Secondly, being apart physically doesn't mean being apart completely. We can build, nurture and encourage others in a variety of ways even when we are apart. Modern technology means you can actually listen to church at home and if you can't listen at 9:30 when we would normally meet, you can choose to listen at another time that suits you during the day. We can have Bible study and meetings occurring via zoom or other tech platforms. This doesn't mean they are perfect solutions, however they are ways that we can continue to minister to each other. Some of our other recent technology enables us to pick up the phone and talk to others, we can use email or even send an encouraging note by snail mail. Some of us can cook or bake, knit, crochet, donate food or supplies for others. Perhaps you've mowed your neighbour's lawn when they were unable, collected supplies from the supermarket for someone who has been unable to shop for themselves. I'm absolutely certain that there are people within our community here who have been praying for others. May I reassure you of the incredible power of prayer. If you feel you can do nothing else, God is always willing to listen to your prayers. Prayer is a powerful tool. Amazing things result when God's people come to Him in prayer.

Finally, as we declare God's praises, the one who called us from darkness into light, who sent his son Jesus to die in our place to restore our relationship with our Creator; we have been gifted a unique opportunity. Amongst the uncertainty of how Covid -19 will impact on our future, we have the chance to envisage ways to work alongside God as He builds His Kingdom. To dream dreams and see visions of how we communicate the love of an unchanging God in our rapidly changing world. To be brave. To step away from tradition and try something new. Let us encourage the visionaries within our midst to share what they see.

As Christians we need to realise new believers and those yet to accept Christ will come from different worldviews. They will see things from a different perspective. As Christians we need to be sensitive to this. The truth of the gospel remains unchanged. The foundation stone remains consistent. Yet the way we share the message can be modified, contextualised to help people's understanding. We can help others realise their value has 'Living Stones' helping to build Christ's Kingdom.

Let us draw near to God to sustain our spiritual needs and to seek His wisdom as to the best way to build a community of living stones, shining the nourishment of Christ into a suffering world. Let's be proactive. Remember when we call out to God he longs to provide the nourishment we require. I invite you to think about What ways will you commit to connect with God to meet your spiritual needs this week?

While we are saved by Grace, we are known by our actions. What are you able to do that will help build a community that reflects God's light? Let's work together to be a vibrant community built on the precious cornerstone of Christ!

Kathy Whittam

10th May, 2020

* From Pentecost to Patmos, Craig L. Blomberg, 2006, Apollos, Intervarsity Press. p.446

** Introducing The New Testament Its Literature and Theology, Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green & Marianne Meye Thompson, 2001, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company. p.523