

IN 1963 (almost 60 years ago) Betty Friedan published a book entitled, The Feminine Mystique, which was believed to have set off a second great wave of the Feminist Movement in America. It was based on certain Sociological Studies and spoke against the stereotype roles in America of husband as wage earner and wife as homemaker. It made comparisons of the American housewife to prisoners of war in World War II in Nazi Germany – totally dependent on their keepers (in this case husbands). It urged the then typical suburban housewife to step out of her role of creating the “happy home” as wife, mother, cleaner, cook, shopper, etc. and to focus more on self – TO FIND HERSELF. It ignored the 30% of married women who were already at that time working outside the home and the millions of wives who stood shoulder to shoulder with their husbands on farms. Make use of your potential!

Now as Christians we would readily agree that God wants us to make the best use of our God-given gifts and abilities. However, our use should reflect his priorities. He says marriage is a good thing! Children are a blessing from God himself! Family is a gift! Mothers and fathers are a blessing! Work and careers are blessings – by them we provide for our families! In our work we can enjoy a measure of satisfaction! But work is only a means to an end – providing for our needs and those who depend on us. While a child might have the gifts and abilities to “grow up to be president” or a major league baseball player, that may not be where the Lord has chosen to use him/her. So many today, men and woman, are trying to “find themselves”. Without listening to God’s guidance, such self-focus is destructive. We see it in lives destroyed by selfishness every day. The writer of the Proverbs(14:1) says, “**The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.**”

This morning in our text, the Lord speaks about building a house, not a physical building or even a family but the Church, the gathering of believers. It is built on Christ! His saving work! Likewise, every family or home that builds on Christ and gives him first priority will be built up – prosper! Not always in terms of money – but spiritually, in Christ with a great measure of peace and joy and hope in this sin filled world. So we consider:

THEME: BUILDING THE SPIRITUAL HOUSE

I. BUILD UPON THE SPIRITUAL STONE (CHRIST)

II. SERVE AS LIVING STONES

Peter speaks to Christians scattered throughout the then known world – but he is also speaking to us. He points to a Living Stone – THE LIVING STONE! “**4 As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 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.**” He speaks of Jesus – the Living Stone. YOU ALSO ARE LIVING STONES – BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE!

There are two things that we should note: He was REJECTED BY MEN but CHOSEN BE GOD. He follows his statement with proof from Isaiah 28:16, “**For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."** In ancient times a house was built off of a cornerstone. That cornerstone would determine the direction for each succeeding wall. It would shape the building. Isaiah and now Jesus uses that picture to speak of another house – a Spiritual House – one whose cornerstone was specifically CHOSEN - one that is PRECIOUS. One that is reliable, “**the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.**” And the whole building runs out from it!

PRECIOUS to those who believe but quite something else for those who do not, “**7 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," 8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.**” For those who like the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day reject him as the source of all blessing – this cornerstone cause them to stumble and fall. They stumble because they, “**they disobey the message**”, they do not believe that Jesus is Savior. Such was their destination! Rejection leads to death!

How precious is Jesus to you? Precious enough to lure you to worship- study of the Word – week after week – day after day? Precious enough to shape your life? Precious enough for you to give up your life to his service – willing to strain every muscle for the kingdom – even death? Or can ‘you take it or leave it’? Are you still ‘trying to find yourself’? Other things are more important?

Think of what we were? For Peter writing to these scattered Christians, “**Once you were not a people**”. Once the Jews were God’s chosen nation. But you were not among them! Before you were Gentiles! Outsiders! Stumbling in the darkness of unbelief! The dark path leading to Hell! But you were called out of that DARKNESS!

We all have a former life – before we came to know the CORNERSTONE – Jesus Christ. A life of fog, deep darkness, one where we could not see clearly—one that is frightening! One with a fear of death! Trying to “find

ourselves". It was there before our baptism, where Jesus brought us into the light. Too often, we have drifted back into the darkness – so many who have come to know Christ have – a FOG of abuse, alcohol, health destroyed, neglecting the Word in our lives. Life without vision! We, too, at times have joined the crowd whether our sin is great or small in the eyes of the world!

Make no mistake, THIS STONE DIVIDES! When this stone is rejected it causes people to stumble and fall into the gaping hole of Hell. BUT, **"To those who believe..."** HOW PRECIOUS!

Today, much of MOTHERHOOD and, yes, FATHERHOOD is darkness. Too much focus on careers and 'job satisfaction. Focus on obtaining wealth, personal worldly success, children's success, worldly trinkets, outward appearances, beautiful homes but as Jesus describes it – graves – that lead on to destruction.

There is but one answer – This precious stone! **"Once you had not received mercy, BUT NOW YOU HAVE RECEIVED MERCY!"** I wonder how well we, today, understand the word, 'MERCY'. In terms of material goods, if we are of the 'HAVES', it is so easy to dismiss the needs of those who have not. If we are of the 'HAVE NOTS' it is so easy to demand that others owe us a living, it is our right. MERCY IS UDESERVED KINDNESS! Like the mother who takes in the muddy stray kitten that a child brings home or the older lady who reaches out to a poorer neighbor so that the family can buy a piano for a child who loves music. We are the objects of God's undeserved kindness, HIS MERCY. As Peter says earlier in this letter, **"In his great MERCY he has given us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** What mercy! As sinners, we deserve nothing but judgment from our righteous and holy God. In his great mercy, he sent his Son Jesus to suffer and die in our place and then to rise from the dead in victory over death. In his great mercy, even now, he calls us by this Gospel. In his mercy he sends the Holy Spirit to give us a "New birth" – faith to trust all of Jesus' promises. In his mercy, by faith he gives us a LIVING HOPE – THE PROMISE OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND LIFE ETERNAL IN HEAVEN WITH JESUS! Most stones are nothing but dead weight. Not our Savior – He is the Living Stone. He assures us, **"the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."** BUILD YOUR LIFE ON THAT LIVING STONE!

II. Then SERVE AS LIVING STONES! When we find a person lying on the ground – not moving – no signs of breathing, we do not know if he is alive or dead. When we build our lives on the LIVING STONE – Jesus there will be signs of life. Moved by his love for us, he encourages us to SERVE AS LIVING STONE. Listen, **"5 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."** Peter calls the believers Living Stone – by faith a part of a Spiritual House – in the picture he uses - building blocks in the walls – the Spiritual House made up of God's people. He says as believers we are part of a "holy priesthood" who like the priest of the Old Testament were given the task of bringing sacrifices to God– that are now acceptable to God for Christ's sake. SERVE AS LIVING STONES!

Peter explains this priesthood more completely in our text, **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** Serve as LIVING STONES, not dead weight, LIVING STONES that have one primary mission in life, praising the one who brought them out of DARKNESS into the wonderful LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL. We are sinners all naturally lost and rightly condemned BUT NOW WE HAVE BEEN SHOWN MERCY!

The Lutheran Church has always recognized the teaching of the "Universal Priesthood of All Believers". God has given all of us the right and responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. All of us as believers are priests! All are called to proclaim the praises of the Savior in our individual lives. There is no distinction based on race or gender or nation. And while we train and call pastors and teachers to help build us up in the faith and for the sake of good order, we dare not cede that right and responsibility to anyone.

How are we doing in that task as priests? In this community? In our own homes? Yes, fathers as head of the household have a great responsibility to lead, But MOTHERS ALSO share in the important work of sharing Jesus with the next generation. Often they have the most contact with children and at times better skills. Far more important than helping put more food on the table is raising the next spiritual generation – instructing in the Word. If you read the first Reading for the day from **Proverbs 31** – the description of a 'Wife of Noble Character'. The Lord praises her for her hard work, responsibility, and wisdom. He reminds us that charm and beauty are fleeting. He says, **"Many women do noble things but you surpass them all..."** – but **"a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."** Thank God for the mother who gave us birth but most of all for Christian mothers who have shared Jesus with us. Building a physical house takes a lot of work...so does building the Spiritual House – God's house – the church. Give that building your priority! AMEN