



May 10, 2020 • The 5th Sunday of Easter
Acts 7:55-60, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14
The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

On our walks in our neighborhood, my boys, who are six and eight years old, love to pick up rocks. I marvel at their ability to notice immediately the unique beauty and detail in what looks to me to be an ordinary rock by the side of the road. At their ages, they know just enough about the process of polishing a dusty rock into a gem, of cracking a craggy geode to reveal the glittering colors within, and of rocks and layers of earth changing gradually over time, that they are firm in their beliefs that rocks are living, that stones are living.

At some point in our walk, the question always comes up, “Mom, can you carry these for me? Mom, can you put these rocks in your pockets, please? They are so heavy!” The question always makes me laugh, and also, honestly, often makes me sigh.

I am reminded today through our readings that it really does matter how we carry rocks for one another, how we carry living stones, how we carry for one another what is heavy.

In Bible Study this past Wednesday, Pastor Anthony and Barbara Cushing noted that in this letter of First Peter, the author is exhorting those who receive the letter to leave behind their old behaviors, because it really matters, as people of faith, how they live now. “So leave behind all those things you used to do,” the author says, “It doesn’t serve you now. And moreover it doesn’t serve our community. For all of us are living stones built upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. And if we let ourselves, we will be built into a new spiritual house.”

It is important to remember that the people receiving Peter’s letter were scattered all across the region (and, of course, at that time there was nothing even close to digital communication) and many of them were also isolated within their own homes for fear. Look what had happened to Stephen!¹ He was stoned to death. They were isolated in fear of what happened to Stephen.

¹ Acts 7:55-60

They were isolated in fear of a mother for her black child going for a run in his neighborhood², walking home from a store³, driving a car⁴, sitting in the car⁵, opening a cell phone⁶, or even breathing⁷. Such fear. There are so many things it is dangerous to do simply for being black.

They knew, as do we, that sticks and stones break bones—and so do words, so does greed, so does political corruption. They know that guns and fists break bones, and so does racism.

Those of us who, simply by the color of our skin, the means with which are born, or the means with which we find ourselves—those of us who have any extra room in our pockets: might we be willing to walk more slowly or uncomfortably in order to carry and bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters? In order to bear witness?

For stony is the path that we are treading⁸ --but if that path does not pave the way for justice and security and health for all, then it is not Jesus' way, it is not God's way; it is not the way, the truth, the life.⁹

If we, living stones scattered all around Metro Detroit and around the country, isolated in our own homes, do not let ourselves be built into a new spiritual house, a refuge of justice, a haven of freedom...then we are not living, are we?

As Herbert says,¹⁰

*Come. my Way, my Truth, my Life;
Such a Way as gives us—all of us—breath,
Such a Truth as ends all strife,
Such a Life as killeth death.*

² Ahmaud Arbery, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/09/ahmaud-arbery-father-marcus-georgia-running>

³ Trayvon Martin, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/07/31/631897758/a-look-back-at-trayvon-martins-death-and-the-movement-it-inspired>; Mike Brown, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/five-years-after-ferguson-missouri-police-shooting-michael-brown-jr-n1040226>

⁴ Sandra Bland, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/07/sandra-bland-video-footage-arrest-death-police-custody-latest-news>

⁵ Corey Jones <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/03/07/fired-florida-policeman-guilty-slaying-black-motorist-corey-jones/3090653002/>

⁶ Stephon Clark, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/07/us/sacramento-stephon-clark-shooting/index.html>

⁷ Eric Garner, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/16/eric-garner-death-new-york-no-charges>

⁸ "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46549/lift-every-voice-and-sing>

⁹ John 14:6

¹⁰ "The Call" by George Herbert, http://www.georgeherbert.org.uk/archives/selected_work_01.html

Amen.