

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

What is in this bag?

Would you like to have one?

What is your favorite kind of stone?

Are gemstones good for building tall buildings?

What kind of stone is typically used for building?

Is granite used for jewelry?

So different stones have different uses. Some are pretty to look at, but not very functional; some are functional, but do not sparkle.

Which kind of stones are valued more?

Which kind of stones do we need more?

God provides us what we need, which often is not what we think we want. Spiritually, people often chase after fake yet pretty gems, the “feel good” and “look impressive” things that society deems important, like fame and money, rather than the bedrock of life, such as faith, family, and lasting, loving relationships.

What kind of stone would you like to be?

Peter called Christians to come to the Lord as living stones. What does that mean?

May we all live as part of God’s kingdom, living

stones laid against the cornerstone of Jesus, shaped by the Holy Spirit and mortared with God's love.

Gospel lesson

This reading is the beginning of Jesus's Farewell Discourse to His disciples, after foretelling His betrayal and Peter's denial at the Last Supper but before heading out to the garden.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-086-washing-feet/>

John 14:1-14 NRSV

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth,

and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn “The Church's One Foundation”

UMH #545

Message: Like Living Stones



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/a-living-hope/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty Rock and foundation of our eternal lives,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may trust in the power and steadfastness of
Your grace and help others to do the same. Amen.

We continue celebrating “A Living Hope” this Easter
season with “Like Living Stones”:

““You are my rock.” How many songs can we sing
about the rock of our faith? Lots, no doubt.

But we are living stones, so what does that mean?
How do we commit to building a church that
transforms not just those inside, but those outside
as well? How will our body-building strengthen our
whole neighborhood and not just ourselves?

This is the challenge of the living stones:

discipleship for the transformation of the world.”

Have you ever played Jenga?



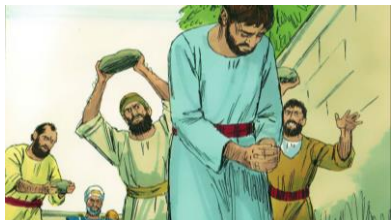
picture from MMMS collection

At my nephew's wedding venue, they had a large set of blocks set in a tower on a stump. Several guests played the game, and eventually the tower of wood fell over.

I looked at the stump and thought, "That's cool, but it doesn't seem like it will be useable very long. Wood tends to warp and decay in the weather. Stone would last longer."

Things of this world tend to be ephemeral like that. Christ died on a wood cross, but that did not last. He was placed in a stone tomb, but that did not contain Him. God is far more powerful and permanent than anything created can be.

In the psalm we hear fears about shame, enemies, and persecutors.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/stephen-martyred/>

In Acts, we heard about Stephen being stoned for professing what he saw. In this sinful world, people are denied value, shamed, and treated badly because they are different from the more powerful populace around them.

But Christ is our refuge. The psalmist knows God as his rock and his fortress, safety from any attack. Stephen, knowing Christ, was not only willing to go to Him upon death, but asked that those who stoned him be forgiven! What kind of mindset enables that?

I grew up a minority in a heavily Jewish and Italian area of Long Island, sounding different because my parents were Canadian and I did not have the Long Island accent. Yet even when other kids teased me, it did not really bother me too much. For one thing, my siblings loved teasing their little sister mercilessly; I joked about going to school for quiet.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-person-s-palm-with-letters-8383448/>;

photo credit: Tara Winstead

But more than that, I grew up knowing Jesus is always with me, valuing me with His love enough that He went to the cross for me and came back from the dead for me. Since God values me that much, no snide comments matter in comparison. I focused on other things.

When you are sure of self-worth, you can withstand denigrations of others more readily. You can see the handiwork of God more obviously, constantly blessing you and the world around you in everything our Creator causes to be.

When you understand through Jesus that God loves and values you so much, you can risk making yourself vulnerable to what God has planned and grow into something much greater.



*picture from MMMS
collection/creation*

With Jesus as our cornerstone, we become living stones in God's church, part of a long-lasting legacy that will not be toppled like a Jenga tower nor shattered like gems under a hammer, yet will sparkle with the light of Christ far more beautifully than any stone could.

Jesus Himself reassured the disciples in today's Gospel that His followers can trust in the power and glory of God. He proved it through His death and resurrection: if you do not believe what He said then, believe in Him because of His works!

Trust Jesus! Rely on Christ as the foundation of our lives, stabilizing us during misfortune and trials, supporting us as we grow in Spirit and in love.



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/a-Living-hope/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-a-Lectioary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-a-graphics>

Be living stones, bracing others with the love of Christ. Be vulnerable to their rough edges, that the mortar of God's love can bind us together solidly.

Let the Holy Spirit use you to build our community into the body of God's glorious Church, that the holy kingdom of God's love may overcome this sinful world.