

*From today's psalm:*

*"Be our strong rock, O Lord, a castle to keep us safe,  
for you are our crag and our stronghold..."*

You know that old folk tale "Stone Soup"?

Each culture seems to have a version.

It's about a group of people who start a soup kettle going  
with nothing more than water and a stone.

Eventually others join in to add carrots or potatoes or a few herbs  
and pretty soon there's a tasty soup.

Today's lections are a veritable "stone soup" of scripture.

It's one of those weeks when the readings seem to conjure  
a common image -- of stones.

Stones come in handy, don't they?

I keep my house in bloom all winter  
by planting amaryllis and paperwhites in stones.

Earlier this week I spent a couple of wonderful days with college friends on  
the lake in Ohio.

Even the cold rain couldn't keep us away from gathering stones on the beach  
– tokens of having been there, together;  
of the rock-solid bond between us that endures over the miles and  
through the years.

If you came in the front door this morning, you passed the Witness Stones  
honoring Grace and Esau,  
two children of God enslaved by a prominent member of this parish,  
Captain Titus Brocket.

Grace and Esau represent others whose stories we've previously overlooked.  
whose stories we need to honor.

Today's reading from the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter attributed to Peter,  
has a sequence of stone images.

Christ is a living stone, it says,  
and through him we are living stones too,  
when we let ourselves be built into a spiritual house.  
God in Christ is our cornerstone, chosen and precious.

Today's psalm asks God to be the rock on which we stand,  
the castle which keeps us safe,  
the crag to which we cling.

In today's gospel, so often heard at funerals,  
the stone image is more suggested than stated.  
Usually when I have the privilege of reading those words,  
it's right before standing by a headstone, or perhaps the granite boulders  
in our memorial garden,  
proclaiming the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.  
The story of the rolled away stone.

And of course in our first reading from Acts it's a different use of stones  
entirely, as we read of Stephen,  
the first Christian martyr, who prayed for those stoning him to death.

We get a little of everything in today's scriptural "stone soup".

So, here's a stone.

Back in the pre-COVID days, I had baskets of them for Vestry meetings.  
At the end, we'd pass them around, each take one and write a prayer request  
on it with a Sharpie.

I dare say many of you have either written on one of these,  
or had your name written on it, or both.

Then we pass the basket around again each taking someone else's stone  
to add to our prayers for the next month.

It was a "stone soup" of prayer.

Like a lot of things, we lost track of this when COVID hit and Vestry moved onto Zoom.

And we've not remembered to do it since we've been meeting in person again.

Maybe I'm feeling sentimental since I realize I only have two more vestry meetings before I retire.

But I do plan to restart this at Tuesday's Vestry meeting.

But why wait?

Why not make our own "stone soup" of prayer right here, now, in our combined single service on a day celebrating Newcomers and Neighbors?

Here's how it works.

Take a quiet moment to listen for what God might be nudging you to pray.

Then write on the stone, clearly – a name, nickname or initials;

an issue or part of the world you're concerned about;

a thanksgiving;

whatever God has put on your heart.

Then, at the Peace, give your stone to someone else to take home to pray.

Make a trade.

And here's the fun part – don't just hand it to the person sitting closest to you.

How about someone beyond your pew, someone you don't know well.

Really stir it up!

Let's make a delicious stone soup together.

Take a moment. Let us pray . . .

AMEN.