

## “A Spiritual Home”

Stouffville United Church  
Sunday, May 10, 2020

1 Peter 2:2-10

I know many of you are familiar with the story of the three little pigs, and the big bad wolf. One little pig built his house out of straw and the big bad wolf came and blew down his house. The second little pig built his house of sticks and the big bad wolf came and blew down his house. But the third little pig, who was very smart, built his house out of bricks. And when the wolf came and huffed and puffed, he could not blow down the house of bricks.

In real life though, houses made out of bricks are vulnerable to other assaults – time erodes the brick, as we’re finding at Stouffville United, as the weather and atmosphere slowly erode the bricks of our building due to their composition. Houses of brick are vulnerable to earthquakes and hurricanes. But churches, built out of stone and bricks, have always been considered immovable, and unchangeable – structures that have dominated major intersections in every city and town in North America. When Notre Dame in Paris, France suffered a horrendous fire a year ago, the world grieved at the loss of one of its treasures. But the buttresses held and the walls stayed up, even though the roof and spire collapsed into the raging inferno.

For over a thousand years, our church buildings, set on cornerstones of faith, have defined our identity and claimed status as an institution with relevance and meaning for the culture. As the children’s song goes, *Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people!* All the people under the one roof. All the people gathered in the sanctuary. All the people in the church. But at one time in the story of Christianity, there were no brick buildings to say ‘here is the church’.

When Peter was writing the words of our text today, the temple in Jerusalem lay in ruins, destroyed by the Roman empire in 70 AD. And perhaps, as he remembers that scene, with the temple walls in pieces and scattered on the ground, his imagination went to the strong building images found in the words of the prophets, found in the words of the psalms, to find the stones to build up in a time of tearing down. From Psalm 118:22, “The stones that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” And from Isaiah 28:16: “There says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.”

And standing on this base of a sure foundation, with the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ, Peter says, “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.” A Commentary wrote, Peter says “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”: this is far different from saying, “Build a spiritual house.” If we were to build a spiritual house, we might think about capital campaigns and a new education wing ... or renovating the worship space. This building, however, is not something we do: “Let yourselves be built” is the essential word.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2, Homiletical Perspective, 463.

As a church, if I asked you to build a spiritual house – you’d be on it – you’d get some great programs going on in the church, you’d advertise and the people would come and it would be a great spiritual house because you’re all here under this roof. But that isn’t what Peter is saying. He is saying, ‘let *you* be built’. Let *you* be built.

A spiritual house is not a building. A spiritual house is you, without the walls, the bricks, the institution. With these words from Peter, we are stretching our understanding of what a spiritual house is. It is not restricted to the building. It is not attached to the building. There are no walls, there is no address. A spiritual house is you in relationship to the world you find yourselves in.

We have been worshipping like this for seven weeks now. We worship from our living rooms and kitchens, some of us still in our pyjamas, but all connected through the internet to experience community like we’ve never experienced it before. We are developing a new found sense of what it means to be together when we can’t see each other. We pray for our church family members. We sing with them, even when they can’t hear us. And Jesus is in the middle regardless of where we meet – whether as before when we were together in a building or now when we’re together at a YouTube service.

What matters is that you are here. What matters is that I am here. What matters is that Jesus is here. And *that* is a spiritual house. Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. Because regardless of how or where or when we meet, our spiritual house is grounded in our identity in Christ, an identity we share.<sup>2</sup> We miss our church building. We miss our gathering. We miss our friendships. We miss each other very much. But what has this forced separation taught us? That we can be church even when we’re not in the building. That relationships continue to grow and deepen, even when done through zoom and social media. *This* is a spiritual house.

I think for me, the takeaway from what might be months of this way of gathering, is a reclaimed sense of what the church is – it’s not the building. It’s the people. Yes, it’s the people we know and love. But it’s also in the opening of our eyes to the people we haven’t seen clearly until now – the front-line workers in our retirement residences and nursing homes, the people who earn minimum wage working in the grocery stores and liquor stores and drug stores in our town; and we are far more aware now of the vulnerable in our community - the elderly and homeless and those with special needs, thinking of Participation House in Markham.

Covid-19 has not changed our Christian identity. What *has* changed is the ‘house’ we meet in. We truly meet now in a spiritual house. That’s what we are now. No bricks and mortar define us as a church. We do not gather at 34 Church Street and will not for the foreseeable future.

We are a spiritual house. We continue; resilient and brave in this new guise. While we are scattered, we are gathered, into a spiritual house where Jesus is the cornerstone, a spiritual house that nourishes us, that anchors us, that holds us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Working Preacher, 1 Peter 2:2-10 post, May, 2017