

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This morning marks the ninth Sunday that we have worshipped virtually. In addition to today marking the 5th Sunday of Easter, it is also the secular celebration of Mother's Day, which has a connection to the present day United Methodist Church.

Anna Jarvis was the person behind creating Mother's Day and she has a connection to Chattanooga. Anna grew up in Grafton, West Virginia and was a member of Andrews Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. After graduating from what is now Mary Baldwin University, she accepted the invitation from her uncle to work in Chattanooga as a bank teller, which she did for a year before moving to Philadelphia where she was successful as a lifestyle and advertising editor for the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company. She did this with the full love and support of her mother, who died on May 9, 1905. On May 10, 1908, exactly 112 years ago today, Anna Jarvis organized a celebration to honor not only her mother, but all of the mothers associated with Andrews Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. Anna led a movement to persuade Congress and the President to declare Mother's Day as a recognized annual celebration, a movement that successfully led to the proclamation signed by President Woodrow Wilson on May 8, 1914 that set aside the second Sunday of May as a day to remember Mothers and their influence on the lives of their children. It was a celebration that quickly gained acceptance across the United States. But by the mid 1920's, Anna Jarvis became disillusioned by the commercialization of

the holiday and in her later years became an advocate for the abolishment of Mother's Day as it was never her intent that the greeting card companies, the florists, and the candy companies should use this day as a means to make a profit. Ironically, in her final years, Anna Jarvis was confined to a sanitarium and these same greeting card companies, candy companies, and florists paid the bills for her care. In 1992, the now Andrews Memorial United Methodist Church of Grafton, West Virginia, was declared to be the International Shrine of Mother's Day.

On this day we remember mothers, but not all mothers are worthy of remembrance. So, it is a day that we remember all of those women who have influenced our lives, whether or not they have had the ability to bear children at all. On this day, when we are separated from one another for another week, a separation that is occurring for good reason, we acknowledge and celebrate those Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, teachers, mother figures, real mothers, and all of the saints who have influenced our lives over the years. We give thanks for them and we give thanks to God for placing these women into our lives.

In many cases, these women have helped us to form the foundation that we need to be not only who we are but who we are meant to be.

In our lesson this morning from 1 Peter 2:2-10, the author suggests that the Christian community to whom he was writing this letter was like infants... they needed the spiritual milk at the beginning so that they might grow into the Christians that Christ was calling them to be. We are the same. When we were converted to being followers of Christ, our introduction to the faith was an introduction that welcomed us at a slow pace into a new way of being, a new way of living that calls us and moves us to new level of discipleship.

“Christ is made the sure foundation” is what the song tells us. “Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness” is what another song reminds us. This text from 1 Peter reinforces the idea that “on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand”, in other words, we are all in this together, a sentiment that is brought home in our current situation. For nine weeks we have been unable to meet together here at our sanctuary. But with the foundation that we have in Christ, it isn’t necessary for us to meet together all of the time for us to be the people that Jesus is calling us to be. Thank God that some of our ministries to the community are continuing thanks to your dedication, like the food boxes at the elementary school which is a good thing in this time of COVID-19.

With Jesus the Christ as our foundation, we each become the building blocks that can be molded and made into the structure that lives into and makes ministry in our world. “Let yourself be built,” Peter pleads with us. “Let yourself.” It’s not for us to decide, to say, “I’m going here; I’m going to hold up this wall; I’m going to frame that window; I’m going to lie on this path.” No, let yourself be built. Go where he wants you, where he can use you. You’re not in charge; you’re a stone, for heaven’s sake! You’re not the architect; you’re building material. Be built into something greater than yourself, something you may not even see right now. Who knows what you will be? He’s not done with you yet.

But why living stones? Wouldn’t stones that stay put be better? Wouldn’t stones that are inert be better for building? You don’t want your stone house to be all wobbly. Or worse yet, for the stones to come to life and wander about. That is hardly a secure construction pattern.

Well, that’s why riding metaphors too long gets you into trouble. He’s not giving advice to stone masons; he is helping to build the church. He’s bought into this faith thing. God doesn’t want dead weight holding down the pews; God

wants living stones who will live and move and grow in their faith. He doesn't just want a stone who will come and hold up the corner and that's it. He wants a stone that will look for other places to shore up the walls, will learn other methods for framing doorways and paving paths, will discover more opportunities to be a trail marker or respite giver. The uses of a stone, a living stone, are beyond counting. That's who Christ is calling for; that's who Christ was.

A stumbling block – now that's something all good construction grade granite needs to aspire to, am I right? Sure, I want to be the one that stubs toes and bruises knees. Especially when they deserve it. At least that's what Peter seems to imply. They stumble because they disobey. And they deserved it. Right? They were just bad, says Peter. We're better. We're royal. We're part of God's light show. We're the ones who have received mercy, even though we hadn't before and even though we were just as bad. Even though we deserved it; even though . . . Hmm.

What if Jesus didn't come to be a stumbling block? What if instead Jesus came to be a stone bridge that leads us from where we are to where we could be, where we're called to be? Because people are clumsy and sometimes don't want to move and get satisfied with ruts, they stumble. A better way is before us, and we stumble because it might be better; but it definitely is different. Maybe destined means that as long as we follow our own inclinations, we're sunk, or limping with bruised and bloody toes. But when we receive the mercy of living differently and once we pledge allegiance to the king and not to the monuments of our own making – however good they may be or seem – then we learn to walk differently.

And Peter says, with, it seems, a certain amount of surprise and relief, that Christ chooses to let us be a part of the plan, a part of the structure to build a

new kingdom, a better kingdom. Come and be built. Come and be alive and participate in something bigger than yourself. Come and grow into something more.

To be a priest is to be a go between. We can help usher someone else into a new way of living. We are privileged to partner with the king; that's why we're royal priests, not because we are special, but because HE is special. We're just like the ones stubbing their toes and knocking their knees. We aren't better than they are; we're just being used for a greater cause than we even knew was out there. It is his mercy that makes us worthy of being a living stone.

And the more we can learn about what that means, the more effective and the more complete we will be. The more alive we will be. The more we are willing to set aside our own preferences and patterns for the service of the king, the more we will grow as living stones.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.