

**1 Peter 2:1-12, Acts 2:22-32**

**“Living Stones”**

**St. John’s Presbyterian Church**

**Rev. Heather Carlson, April 19, 2026**

Travel with me in your imagination... To Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia— the provinces of Asia Minor in the first century.

These are the places and people to whom Peter the Apostle writes his first letter. Communities scattered across a world shaped by Greek and Roman culture— people who have grown up surrounded by temples, rituals, and the worship of many gods.

And in the province of Asia, one structure rises above them all. The great Temple of Artemis. We see it long before we reach it— its shape rising in the distance, catching the sunlight. As we approach, the details begin to emerge: 115 meters (377 ft) long and 55 meters (180 ft) wide - bigger than a modern day football field. Surrounded by row upon row of towering marble columns, more than a hundred of them, each soaring 18 meters, 60 feet, in the air, high above us.

The whole structure stretches out—vast, symmetrical, overwhelming. To step inside is not just to enter a building... it is to walk into opulence and grandeur. Everything gleams.

This is no ordinary ancient construction. In a region that builds with limestone and other mixed materials, this structure is built almost entirely of white marble—rare, costly, radiant in the sun. It is an absolute marvel that every massive stone carved from the quarry miles away, sculpted with artistry and precision, and transported to fit and stand in its exact place. And the columns are not merely functional; they are adorned with carvings, reliefs, painted detail— art and architecture woven together into a single, breathtaking space.

Even the ground beneath it tells a story. Engineered on marshy soil to withstand earthquakes, it stands as a triumph not only of beauty, but of ingenuity and engineering. A fitting residence for the gods of Mount Olympus.

Yet this is not just a religious site. It is the heart of the city. A place of worship, yes—but also of economy, identity, and power. Pilgrims travel from across the Mediterranean to stand where we are standing. Wealth is stored here. Festivals fill its courts. Teeming with tourism, trade, hope and pride. It will be named one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It has stood for nearly 400 years by the time of Peter’s letter. For centuries, people have lived in its shadow and significance.

Now imagine... You are one of the early Christians in this region. A neighbor turns to you and asks, “Where is the temple to your God?”

It’s a simple question. An obvious question. Where do you point? Where is the place that shows God’s greatness? Where are the columns, the altars, the visible signs of power and glory?

You go home that evening and wonder. Where *is* the temple of our God? Where does the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit reside? Where do people go to meet Him? And then—a letter arrives. From Peter. You may never have met him. But you know his story.

He was a fisherman, ordinary, impulsive, the kind of person who often spoke before thinking. And yet Jesus called him, and even gave him a new name: Peter, which means 'rock.'

Peter saw incredible things—Jesus calming storms, healing the sick, even raising the dead. He was bold enough to step out of a boat and walk on water... until fear took over.

He was also the one who said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But on the night Jesus was arrested, Peter failed. Three times, he denied even knowing Him.

And then—the turning point—the tomb was empty. Jesus was alive. And Jesus sought Peter out, forgave him, and restored him. From that moment on, Peter was changed.

The fearful fisherman became a bold witness, standing up to say: 'This Jesus God raised up—and of that we are all witnesses.'

The testimony of Peter, the witness of others, the love of the fellowship of Jesus followers, the scripture that pierced and comforted your soul, the presence of God's Spirit. It all worked together to stir your heart toward following Jesus too.

And here in Peter's letter—he does not describe marble columns. He does not point you to a structure of stone. Instead, he writes: "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house..."

Living stones. Not carved. Not cold. Alive. People and communities chosen from the quarries and quagmires of life to be shaped and sculpted for a perfect fit into God's spiritual home. This little group of Jesus followers huddled around someone reading Peter's letter are not the ragtag band of misfits they may appear to be to the human eye. Look around at your companions, for by the work of God, we are precious, chosen, living stones declaring the glory of God.

The question is no longer, "Where is the temple to your God?" But the realization: God is building with us. Not out of marble—but out of people. You begin to see it. Not in towering columns, but in gathered lives. In people who sing together. Who pray. Who forgive. Who learn the humility and persistence of loving God and neighbour. Who give. Who stand with quiet courage against the darkness around them. A different kind of structure is rising— not one that dominates the skyline, but one that quietly transforms the world.

And yet... Peter is honest. Peter tells us that the foundation of this house is not laid by human hands, but by God himself: Jesus Christ— the cornerstone. This cornerstone—Jesus—is not obvious to everyone. He is, as Peter says, a stumbling stone. Choices people make to follow their own way, not God's.

Many look—and see nothing. No grandeur. No spectacle. No marble brilliance. And so they miss Him, or reject his way of grace and love. They cannot yet see that the true wonder is not something you walk into... It is something you become part of.

The Temple of Artemis was once one of the greatest sights on earth. People traveled across the world to see it. Today—it is ruins. Columns fallen. Stones scattered. Its glory faded into history. But the thing Peter spoke about— a people built on the risen Jesus—that is still here. Still growing. Still being built. Still alive.

Across centuries. Across continents. Across cultures. Because this cornerstone is not a stone that can crack or crumble— it is the one of whom Peter declared: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses." And that changes everything.

Because Jesus is risen— the foundation holds. Because Jesus is risen— then this building will not fall. Because Jesus is risen— then your life and our life together is not random, not disposable, not disconnected—you, we, are living stones, being shaped and placed into something eternal. A witness to the risen Christ.

So the invitation Peter gives is simple, but profound: “Let yourselves be built...” Allow God to take your life, our life together — with all its rough edges, all its history— and set it into His living structure.

To be joined to others. To rest on Christ. To become part of something far greater than any temple of marble. Because the real wonder of the world is not a building made of stone. It is a people made alive by the risen Jesus. God’s dwelling place. May it be so in our lives and in our life together.