

# You Just Might Be a Rock Star!

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## Rocky Mountain Annual Conference Ordination Service

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I want to thank Bishop Elaine for the invitation to speak today. It is indeed an honor and privilege for me. And the way she extended the invitation made it almost irresistible. She called up and said she wanted to squeeze every last drop of ministry out of me before I retired! How can you refuse that kind of invitation? And she said I could preach on anything I wanted as long as it was 1 Peter 2:4. And, oh by the way, I could preach as long as I wanted as long as I wanted to preach for 10-15 minutes. I'm here. And you see what the scripture is. Now we'll see how well we do on time! (And just to be totally transparent, some of what I just told you actually happened!)

Now, let's jump into the scripture, which surprisingly enough is 1 Peter 2. But before I read that, let me set it up just a bit. The purported author is Peter and you all know who Peter was. He was a follower of Jesus and even more than that, he was a part of the inner circle of disciples. And, of course, you know that he was not always called Peter. He was named Peter by Jesus after he was the first to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. And you know what "Peter" means. It is rock! Jesus said he was going to use him to build the church. I say that so you can see why the imagery of this scripture is so important.

1 Peter 2: 4-6 (The Message)

***"Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The scriptures provide precedent: 'Look! I'm setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honor. Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it.'"***

The Word of God for the people of God!

We've been talking a lot about rocks at this Annual Conference. If this is your first worship service, you need to know that. And Southern Colorado is a good place to talk about rocks. We probably have more than our fair share. From the Sangre De Christos, to the Spanish Peaks, to Huerfano Butte, to the plains,...we have rocks.

We share that characteristic with the Holy Land. If you go to the Old City of Jerusalem, you will find it is formed with ancient white, limestone rocks. They used the readily available building material.

I still remember my first trip through the wilderness outside Jerusalem. I was traveling in a nice, air conditioned tour bus, but the scenery was hot, dry and parched. The wilderness was rocks strewn for as far as you could see. And I can remember thinking to myself, "What a God forsaken place!" And then I caught myself. "No, this is the Holy Land!"

Rocks obviously had great meaning for Peter as well. That was his name. Given to him by Jesus. It told of what his new nature and his new mission would be.

And this passage of scripture is doing the same thing. It is taking the old imagery and symbolism and transforming it into this new thing God is creating. The rock symbolism is used, but now the rocks are going to be living rocks. And the sanctuary is no longer to be the temple but a “sanctuary vibrant with life!” There will still be sacrifices, but they will no longer be animal sacrifices, but “offering Christ-approved lives.” There will still be priests, but it won’t be the priestly clans. It will be shared with all who respond. Not just those we recognize today, but everyone. The author moves us to a far more spiritual and even mystical understanding. This is radical stuff!

You, as the reader, get invited into the story. You are invited into the imagery. You see the movement. Jesus is rejected as the cornerstone of the cornerstone of this new, living temple, but God puts Jesus in place anyway. Then you are invited to present yourself as well to become a living stone in this “sanctuary vibrant with life.” You are to be one of the new, high priests!

Isn’t that wonderful prose? It is almost poetry. It is so moving and inspiring. It makes you want to say, “Yeah, sign me up! That’s what I want to do and be! Send me!” That’s what those of you who are being ordained, commissioned or licensed have said. “Send me!”

I am so grateful to God that you have heard that call and responded in the way you have. But one of these days, you are going to start asking, “What did I do? What did I get myself in to?” Maybe you have already asked that a time or two.

What does it mean to submit ourselves as a living stone? What does a vital sanctuary really look like? What does a high priest do? What, in the world, are you getting yourselves into? Once you get beyond the beautiful prose, what does it mean?

At the beginning this is far from clear! Maybe you have heard the old story of St. Francis of Assisi. This happened long before anyone thought of him as a Saint. He was still on the edge of being a scoundrel. But, one day he was praying at an old, falling down chapel, when he looked at the crucifix and he heard Jesus say something to the effect of, “build up my church.” It was repeated three times. Impulsive Francis decided that this building certainly needed some work, so he went home to his father’s house, loaded up a horse with fabric and material and proceeded to sell all of the material and the horse. Dad was not happy! Now Francis went on to build up the church in astonishing ways, but it wasn’t by putting one old, dead stone on top of another.

When I started in ordained ministry I was so naive. I assumed that all I needed to do was preach a good sermon on Sunday and everything else would fall into place. That was probably because I had no idea what “everything else” was! Well, you can imagine that assumption lasted for all of about .... A month. In other words, I had no idea what I was doing.

So let me share another image of what church that is full of life can look like. This is taken from the letter to Ephesus, by the apostle Paul. Paul talks about the spiritual gifts and how they influence the body of Christ. ***“He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ’s body, the church, until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.”***

Biblical imagery sometimes moves me in unexpected directions. This is profound scripture, but when I read it, I think of a Texas line dance at worship on Sunday morning. “All

moving rhythmically and easily with each other.” And my guess is that somewhere in the U.S., there is a church doing a Texas line dance, right now!

I’m sure that’s not the image Paul wanted. What he was focusing on was the use of the God inspired gifts that moved the community and us from being dead stones to changing, growing, maturing, developing, fully alive followers of Jesus!

You can see that happening in the life of Peter. Remember Peter? Peter was named the Rock! But when Jesus gave him that name, he was more like a pebble. He was so impetuous. He was far too willing to speak without thinking. Peter stuck his foot in his mouth so many times. My guess is he got himself into all kinds of trouble for what he said and did. In other words, he’s the kind of guy I can relate to! But he became that rock. He became one of those living stones. And we can, too!

But how does that happen? What do we do to assist in making that move? What is our part? Let’s assume you embrace the call found in Peter to build up the church into the sanctuary vital with life. You’ve already tried the Texas line dance and that was fun, but you have this nagging suspicion that there might be something more.

Let me suggest that we need to begin with ourselves and become that living stone. And that leads to everything else. I know that sounds counter intuitive. It’s always more fun to try to change everybody else, but we need to follow the example of Peter. Make mistakes. Fall down. Let God pick us up and dust us off and work some more. We need to allow our very depths to be transformed.

Paul talks about exactly that in the third chapter of Ephesians. He writes, “God can do anything you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.”

Let me assure you that that kind of transformation is possible. We saw it in Peter’s life. You’ve seen it in your own lives. You wouldn’t be here today without the workings of the Divine in your depths.

It has happened in my life. In my early years, I had no intention of living the life of a minister. None! In fact, I still remember sitting in church one Sunday morning in my early teens—sitting on that hard wooden pew that wouldn’t let you go to sleep! And out of somewhere the question came, “Should you become a pastor?” I have no idea where the question came from. I don’t remember that. Maybe it was something the pastor said. Maybe it was just the setting. I don’t know. But I can remember my mental response. It took about a nano second! I said to myself, “Absolutely not!” And my reasoning was instantly clear as well. All pastors were poor. I was already poor and I didn’t like it.

Things change. I changed. My deep desires changed. In later years, I saw ministry as a gift and a privilege. That kind of divine transformation can happen!

But let’s go one last step. What is our part in all of this? Obviously God’s movement is primary, but how do we assist? How do we open ourselves to the movement of the Divine?

My temptation is to give you the answer—my answer. I could tell you, but it would be my answer and that just may not be your answer. And besides, I know what the retention rate would be. This morning your focus is elsewhere! You are wrapped up in the moment. So you might remember my answer until the end of the next hymn.

So, I’m not going to tell you. But I will leave you with the question. How do you work with God in becoming a living stone that builds a spiritual sanctuary? How do you allow God to

make that happen? How can you allow the Divine to form you into the High Priest for serving in a sanctuary filled with life?

I really hope and pray you will seriously ask the question. And I hope and pray you will struggle with living out the answer. I do believe it will be a struggle. It has always been one for me. But the question is important and living out the answer is important as well. For, to paraphrase John Wesley, if you do not, you run the risk of being a trifler all of your days. But if you do seek the answer and live the answer, then it is just possible.....are you ready for this? It is just possible...wait for it....It is just possible that you might be **a rock star!**