

A Priesthood of Living Stones

Friends of open hearts and open minds: On this joyful day, the sacrament of Holy Baptism reminds us that we are beloved from eternity and the sacrament of Holy Communion reminds us that we continue to belong and to be loved in the fullness of our humanity. Scripture and poetry call us recognize and own our work as priests – ones who persistently mediate or convey the love of God to one another.

With your eyes open or closed, I invite you to join your hearts with mine in prayer. Holy Loving Spirit, we are grateful for the freedom to be gathered today – both on our live stream and on this land, which has been loved by First Nations and others across time and where we are now weaving our way of community. Help us in this hour to become clearer on our calling to your priesthood of living stones. We pray this in the name of our friend and teacher, Jesus. Amen.

I would venture to guess that most of us gathered today in this body do not typically think about belonging in a priesthood. Some of us have traveled part of our life experience in a Roman Catholic or Episcopal community. Many of us have traveled through life as Protestants or not attached to any particular segment of the Christian church. Well, today we are called to consider what it means to be a collective priesthood.

St. Francis of Assisi was a friar who lived in Italy across the end of the 12th century and beginning of the 13th century CE. For those like myself not well acquainted with Roman Catholicism, a friar lives in community in a public-facing way (preaching and engaging in active service) as compared with a monk who lives a more secluded, contemplative life of service. A friar can become a priest by engaging in a particular path of spiritual formation and study toward ordination (not unlike I studied toward being an ordained Protestant minister).

I pull you into this moment in the weeds in order to give context for St. Francis of Assisi. Perhaps, like each of us, St. Francis was not a priest in the traditional sense of the role within Roman Catholicism. And yet he understood the call of the writer of the letter of First Peter. A professional priest studies and engages in spiritual formation in order to have a well from which to draw in order to mediate or convey the love of God to others. St. Francis and each of us can do priestly work by drawing our own well of all that has formed us into loving human beings to mediate or convey Christ light to others.

Hear these words from the famous “Prayer of Saint Francis,” which was actually developed by people who followed in the way of St. Francis, given the fact that these words were first articulated and published in France in 1912:

*“Lord, make me a channel of thy peace,
that where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong,
I may bring the spirit of forgiveness...”*

We echoed this today as we baptized Zoey, Eddy and Finley. You can see in your bulletin what we said: *“We promise to do our best to be channels of God’s love for you – leaning on the power of the Holy Spirit as we teach you the ways of our friend and savior – Jesus.”*

What a word – channel! And imagine the groove in a riverbed and in other places that are channels. A lot of grit of life runs through that – it can be smoothed and it can have its dents. It is no light work to be a channel for one another.

This quote emerged sometime in the 20th century and so is falsely ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi as well: *“Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”*

Well, I love words! And yet we are preaching the gospel in every movement that we are making as a gathered community and in the music if you’ll listen closely to what we sing and what we hear sung.

In her book, *Mattering: The Secret to Building a Life of Deep Connection and Purpose*, Jennifer Wallace posits a concept she calls “the mattering core.” She teaches that five pieces contribute to a sense for each of us that we matter. She describes the five pieces in this way (think about this as you wonder if you are being a channel of God’s love for others):

- **Recognition:** *You and your actions are valued, and your absence would be felt*
- **Reliance:** *You feel needed because others depend on you*
- **Importance:** *You feel significant because you’re prioritized*
- **Ego Extension:** *You feel cared for because others are invested in your well-being*
- **Attunement:** *You feel deeply understood and meaningfully responded to*

Just like many of the needs we carry as we walk through this life, probably no one in your life can be a channel of all of these things for you (recognizing you, relying on you, helping you feel important, helping you feel as though your ego is connected to theirs, and totally attuned to you). Does anyone have someone who does all those things for them? I don’t think so. But we can look out for opportunities to do any of those things for others and to recognize and appreciate those people in our lives who do help us recognize and know that we matter.

We trust that we are God's creation. In baptizing Zoey, Eddy and Finley today, we told each of them and reminded ourselves that we bear the image of Father, Mother, Creator God. Therefore, in God we have our being. And, as a being of God, we each matter.

Let's speak about living stones in this priesthood of mattering together. I wonder, have you ever said to someone else or heard someone else say, "You know, I am who I am. Please stop trying to change me." Well yes, we are who we are in the fullness of all the experience and attributes we've collected. Yes, and... We can be a stone (and be who we are – and really sedate and stuck right in that and sure and maybe happily sure of who we are). But what would it mean to be a living stone and to be able to be together in a strong house?

Let's read again a few words from that letter: *"[A]nd like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

How might you be more living and active and collaborative in what you create out of love with others as stones?

I also want to address the passages that have so often been weaponized by people who share the name Christian – especially against Jewish people and others:

*"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,"*

and

*'A stone that makes them stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.'*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."

I think the way it often has become weaponized in settings in which we have found ourselves it that it is interpreted as though this is all about dogma – some very specific ideas created about Jesus after he lived and died and rose and how everyone needed to somehow agree to those exact ideas or else they were pushed right out of the group and right out and onward to hell.

But I think it is telling us what we already know. We do stumble – all of us – I think this is speaking to all of us. So yes, in our tradition we follow Jesus and he is an example – a stone for us. And it says that *“they stumble because they disobey the word”* – that active word of God’s love. If we don’t lean into the Spirit moving in our lives and say yes to the opportunities that come our way to show love, then we will stumble. And we are destined to stumble if we ignore God’s Spirit in our lives.

And there is another part of this passage that has been weaponized: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

This person was on fire. They were so excited about Jesus’ message and that they had experience in that generation. And – the writer was most likely a Jew by faith and culture writing mostly to non-Jews. So, if we were to try to imagine that one particular faith sect or one particular cultural group was THE chosen people, royal priesthood, and holy nation; then we wouldn’t be making much sense. So I think that we are all chosen and that we can be part of this priesthood – this being channels, conveying God’s love, following the example that Jesus offered to us.

So let us close by hearing as a blessing to you a few of the words from Jan Richardson. You may wish to close your eyes or leave them open. Let this be, not only for Zoey, Eddy and Finley today, but also for each of us:

“Beloved.

*Comes holy
to the heart
aching to be new.*

*Comes healing
to the soul
wanting to begin
again.*

Beloved.

*Keep saying it
and though it may
sound strange at first,
watch how it becomes
part of you,
how it becomes you...*

Beloved.”

Friends, let’s be channels – connecting to one another and building a house of love, living stone by living stone. Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll
St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)
May 3, 2026 | Baptism Sunday
1 Peter 2:2-10, “Baptism of Jesus: Beginning with Beloved”