

Matthew 6.13-19

God builds with us

Amington (Online)

Sunday 23 August 2020

Build, build, build [4]

The Rock

I was going to start this morning with a rock joke – but I decided you all take my jokes for granite. Oh go on then... What's the difference between a steak and a rock? One is pretty meaty, the other is a little meteor.

Jesus is in an inventive mood in today's passage. We can't find any other examples of the name Peter in the ancient world before this. *Petros* (Greek) or *Cephas* (Aramaic) are derived from the word for 'rock' – names made up by Jesus, for Simon Peter. 'You are Rocky,' Jesus said, 'and on this rock I will build my church.'

It's quite an important moment then! Peter was the leader of the apostles, whose eyewitness testimony about Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. After Jesus' resurrection he was a rock of that faith, standing firm even in the face of death.

Show video of rock on-screen.

But the thing about rocks is... they're strong, yes, they're firm, yes, there's even a beauty about them... but they don't *do* very much.

Pause with focus on rock.

If I left that rock there, what would it do? Not a lot. Even the gale force winds we've had this week wouldn't budge it.

Camera back to Ben, holding the rock.

I like rocks. Especially when they clump together as mountains. It's worth pausing to admire rocks *look at the rock*, every bit as much as we should pause to admire Peter for his rock-like faith.

But to stop there would be to miss the point. To think this passage is about Peter would be to miss the point... spectacularly.

[Jesus said,] 'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.'

Matthew 16.18 (NIV)

Sure, Peter the rock is *in* that sentence, but it's actually *about pause and turn the rock over (revealing the X)* Jesus. He says to Peter, 'On this rock I will build my church.'

Look at the rock The point is not the rock, but what Jesus does with it. *Put the rock down.*

‘I will build’

First, Jesus is the builder. That shouldn't surprise us; creativity is part of God's character. He is the God who makes something out of nothing, who made a nation for himself from a childless couple nearly 100 years old.

Jesus is the builder; **‘I will build,’** he says. Sometimes we get it the wrong way round: we ask *Jesus* to help *us* build, we ask *him* to help *us* do what *we* want to do, instead of asking *him* what *he* wants *us* to do. It's important we get that the right way round.

For example, when you pray for your friends and family – do you first ask Jesus what *he* wants for them, how *he* would like you to pray? You may find that something – an impression, a picture, a verse from the Bible – pops into your head if you do. It's one of the things Pete Grieg suggests in his book *How to Pray*.

‘My’

Can you imagine if Jesus said to you what he said to Peter that day? Would it go to your head? I suspect it went to Peter's for a while – remember not long after this the disciples starting arguing about which of them was the greatest... although after Jesus said this to Peter, I'm not sure there could be much debate!

Peter could easily have missed the little word **'my'** in there – **'I will build my church'** – and Peter could have acted as though it were *his* church. After all, he's the rock on which it's built...

But Peter ended up in the right place. He wrote these words in his first letter:

As you come to [Jesus], the living Stone... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2.4-5 (NIV)

Peter isn't interested in pressing his claim to be 'the rock', but pointing people to Jesus. There's no 'I am the rock'; instead he says, **'come to him, the living Stone'**. And he continues:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

1 Peter 2.9 (NIV)

He talks about us, God's people – but always pointing up and away, to God. This is the best model of how we should talk, sing, worship, pray, *live*: even when Peter talks about us, he's talking about Jesus.

Because we are *his*.

‘Church’

‘I will build my... church,’ Jesus says.

I wonder what picture pops into your head when you hear that? Buildings, burses, and bishops? The word Matthew uses here is the word *ekklesia*. It was the word for a gathering of people – the gathering of citizens to vote in a Greek city, or the gathering of God’s people in synagogues.

That means what Jesus was – and is – building, is a community of *people*, a family of believers, a nation built on faith.

And *that* means that what makes a church building special isn’t the stones, or the stained glass, or the beautiful sanctuary – special and lovely though they are – it’s the *people who meet in it*, and the *God who is building them into a family*.

So what?

‘I will build my church,’ Jesus says. I find that hugely reassuring.

Did you spot the contrast between life and death in these passages? Peter calls Jesus, **‘the Son of the Living God’** (16). Years later in his letter Peter calls Jesus **the living Stone**, and he calls us **living stones** (1 Peter 2.4, 5).

And Jesus says **‘the gates of Hades’** – a symbol for the power of death – **‘will not overcome’** his people.

It is deeply painful that we can’t meet in our building right now – and that even when we do reopen (hopefully in a couple of weeks) only a handful of us will be able to meet at one time. It may – and possibly does sometimes – feel as though our church is dying.

But our church family is *not* standing still, we have *not* pushed the ‘pause’ button – and we are definitely *not* dying. Things may – in fact probably will – change, but what *won’t* change is Jesus, the life that comes from him, the work he is doing within and among us.

My hope and prayer is that when we are finally able to meet again – all of us together – we will find that we are stronger and closer than ever, in Jesus.

Because *Jesus* is building *his* church – even here, in Amington! – and nothing, not even a pandemic, can stop him. And that surely deserves an Alleluia!

This week let’s spend some time thanking Jesus for all he is doing, despite and through the pandemic.

And next week we’ll be thinking about how we can *join in*.