

Let us pray. Father God, we are very appreciative to be in our church this day, to be in your house this day. Thank you for the change of seasons, yes. Thank you for all your glorious beauty of nature that you provide. Thank you for the hearty souls that are here today. Thank you for the technology that is useful in so many people being able to watch today from whatever they are. We're very grateful. We pray that this day you would inspire us Lord in all of our worship and prayer and song in the word. Inspire the children as they learn your word and all about you. Inspire the music that has been provided by Jeff and Aaron. And Lord we ask you as we talk about you being our cornerstone today that you would take your place as the pastor and the teacher of this church and the church universal in Christ's name we pray. I want to open this morning with Isaiah. The concept being today that Christ is the cornerstone of the church. We want to discover exactly what that means. The idea of him being a cornerstone is all over scripture and I want to begin with Isaiah 28. Therefore listen to this message from the Lord you scoffing rulers in Jerusalem. You boast we have struck a bargain to cheat death and have made a deal to dodge the grave. The coming destruction can never touch us for we have built a strong refuge made of lies and deception. Therefore this is what the sovereign Lord says. Look I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken. I will test you with the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of righteousness since your refuge is made of lies a hail storm will knock it down. Since it is made of deception a flood will sweep it away. I will cancel the bargain you made to cheat death and I will overturn your deal to dodge the grave when the terrible enemy sweeps through. You will be trampled into the ground. Again and again that flood will come morning after morning day and night until you are carried away. This message will bring you will bring terror to your people. The bed you have made is too short to lie on. The blankets are too narrow to cover you. The Lord will come as he did against the Philistines at Mount Perazim and against the Amorite at Gilead. He will come to do a strange thing. He will come to do an unusual deed. Those are the lines that I wanted to finish with even though earlier in the passage it speaks of the foundational stone and the cornerstone. We'll learn lying together. I want to begin with a correction which I came across this week. An error. As my research took me into obviously 1 Peter and then specifically 1 Peter chapter 2, I read other sources surrounding the context of 1 Peter and although there is discrimination in the beginnings of persecution at this time, I'm about 50 years away from the blood persecution that will be ordered by the state. So I want to clear that up. Peter's writing into a persecuted marginalized church to be sure but I have indicated that the blood persecution, the murdering and the disappearing of people and the burning of people and then the focus on Christians as the common enemy that would occur about 50 years later. After this marginalization and slight oppression of the Christians turns into full-blown persecution and I thought maybe he withheld that or maybe I bobbed and weaved around that for a reason because that really struck me. Because here we are of course over 2,000 years later and we the Orthodox church are marginalized, you know, spoken against, nothing that, you know, nobody, praise God, nobody's running in here to shut down this church anytime soon or drag us out into the streets. But I thought he showed me this because this is kind of where we are. We are the Orthodox remnant, if you will, embedded in Babylon, in Rome, at the time when Peter is writing. Now I'm not prophetic and I'm not a prophet, never will claim to be, but what if we're learning all of this now for what is coming in the future? And it just struck me at that time, again human words escape you, how smart God is or how much he, I know, into the future he's going to care for his people, spiritually care for his church, he's going to arm the church and the people with everything they need to survive what is coming. So everything that has been preached is dead on for the church and what those people are going to teach their children and what their children are going to teach their children and I thought, man, that's just unbelievable. That's awesome, that's powerful. So I'm glad that I found that out because it gave a whole new perspective actually on the letter, not just the immediate historical context but the purpose and the infallibility of this letter for all times, all times. And we have seen Peter introduces himself, we learn who he is and then he shares the gospel, we learn who Jesus is

and then he talks about believers and we're learning who the believers are and how believers should behave and we're going to continue on this path throughout the course of the letter so that the individuals can be edified and so the church can be edified for what is coming down the pipe. And we've talked about how simple yet how powerful his words are. We talk all through Advent about love and peace and hope and joy and we have those words in our vocabulary every single day and we use them quite a bit but when we talk about God's love, peace and joy and hope, whole different bulging, whole different meaning. Yet it is those same simple words, God's love. He talks about God's love preserving you in the times of trial. And again you can imagine somebody going through a trial and saying, "Don't worry, God's love will preserve you." It seems really inadequate but we're talking about God's love, not me or my feelings or anything of that nature. His love will strengthen and edify you and give you a whole different sense of purpose and perspective. So we're in here now and I'm going to give you a homework assignment today because I also want to put this bug in your ear before we read today's passage. The Gospels, the letters, all of scripture were not written in chapter and verse. We've talked about that before and the letters, the epistles in particular, are meant to be read in a continuum. They were taken to a church and the reader would read this letter and it may be all day long that the people are together and the letter is read and questions go back and forth and the teachers of the letter that were, a lot of them, commissioned by Paul to go and teach this letter, would field the questions as best they could, come back and read the letter again. They were not sermons and they were not Bible lessons. So for 1 Peter at the end of today, I'm going to ask you to take a big long chunk of 1 Peter and forget about the chapter breaks, forget about the subheadings, forget about the verse numbers and just read it and you'll see how Peter writes this letter and builds this letter one foundational block upon another and that's important for us to do. I've talked many times as a sidebar, we studied the book of James and James just, James, he just, he does the pool punches, he does the mince words, he stands people up and spiritually stacks them across the face and says, "Wake up." And I've often thought about taking that letter just on a Sunday morning and reading it, reading it as it was read in the early church and just then asking you, "How did it hit you? How did it affect you?" That's coming in the future sometime. So 1 Peter 2, the first 12 verses, because this is what we preachers like to do now around here, we read a lot more scripture than I think a lot of churches do, we go deeply into scripture, you've already heard the prophecy of the cornerstone. We're going to talk about what a cornerstone is and how powerful even that imagery is. But let's talk about this. We ended with the first couple of verses of 1 Peter 2 last week. So get rid of all evil behavior, begun with all of the seed, hypocrisy, jealousy, all unkind speech. Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment. And we talked about how the issues that Peter is directly addressing in this marginalization, in this persecution and in the persecution to come, that yes, they're physical. They're going to beat their bodies. They're going to take their homes. They're going to do all kinds of physical things to them. But in essence, Satan is trying to take their soul. He's trying to get them to curse God and turn their back and walk away. Everything about the letter is spiritual in nature. And we're talking about the spiritual foundation of the house of God and the spiritual foundation of every follower of Christ. It's an interesting and different way of perceiving all of the physical, financial stuff, illness, that sort of thing that happens to you. That you're feeling it in the physical, but there is a spiritual battle to use that test, to use that burden that Satan may get in there and say, none of it is worth it. See, none of it is worth it. And he'll curse God, turn around, walk away from him. And I think we've all been there. We've all been there in our moments of loneliness, in our moments of trial. We've all been there. That is the parable of the silver of the seeds. And then a strong wind comes, troubles come, and there's no roots, and they're uprooted and they just fly around. We're trying to get some foundation here. We're trying to get some roots. So we cry out for this nourishment. We should, because we're Christians, we should crave the word of God. We should crave knowledge of God. Now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness, you are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into

his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priest through the mediation of Jesus Christ. You offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the scriptures say, and we just read, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." I was talking with my dear friend Steph this morning. She said, "We haven't had a good snow in a long time." And I said, "Steph, that's an oxymoron. There's no such thing as a good snow." Don't start. Don't start. Okay? But I said, "Strangely enough, we're going to be talking about oxymorons." Oxymorons is a term of description that seems to cancel each other out. Stones, by their very nature, are dead. There's no such thing as a living stone. Sacrifices, by their very nature, are dead. They've been sacrificed. There's no such thing as a living sacrifice. Cornerstones, being cornerstones, being stones, being dead. There's no such thing, literally, as a living cornerstone. But yet scripture speaks of these things. And we have to identify what is being said by going beyond, obviously, the physical description and listening to the oxymoron. Make yourself a living sacrifice, worthy of the Lord. Make all that you do spiritual sacrifices unto the Lord. Over and over and over again, we're taught to make these spiritual sacrifices through prayer, through music, through the word, through fellowship. Everything that we have, we sacrifice unto the Lord. What does that mean? We do it in the honor and in the name of the Lord. We give it to the Lord. There are many people in this church I know, I love, I honor them. I don't worship them. I serve for the Lord. I may, as a friend, have a sacrifice, a bit of my time, or sacrifice a bit of my abilities, whatever that may be, for a friend and so forth. But unto God, we're giving our very selves. We're giving Him. We have died unto ourselves, sacrificed ourselves, and give Him, give ourselves to Him. And we say, "Lord, what will you do? What will you have to do? Lord, what is your will?" And when we come together and when we're praying, whether it's in a corner by yourself or whether it's corporately with your family or whether it's online with a prayer group, whatever the case may be, we're sacrificing spiritually unto the Lord. We're saying, "We are vulnerable. We can't do this. I can't do this. I am vulnerable. You are sovereign. I give myself. I give my condition. I give my concerns. I give my requests to you, Lord." Understanding the very spiritual nature of our existence is key here because Peter is shifting the emphasis away from any physical persecution. And again, they're really going to feel it in a generation. Away from any physical persecution, physical pain, physical to spiritual. And he wants the church to understand, "You are not going to escape this world unscathed. You will not. There will be physical ailments. There will be emotional distress. There will be betrayal and relational issues. There will be, there will be, there will be, you're not going to escape this place unscathed. But will you persevere to the end and be saved?" That's the question. Peter is reinforcing to the church that's what it's about. I want to read this four and five again, if I could. Read four and five, please. "You are coming to Christ who is the living cornerstone of God's temple." That's all spiritual. And we're using physical imagery. Before all of the fancy engineering, before all the fancy technology, cornerstones were incredibly important to build a good building. They were the perfect stone. Great time and effort was made to make them the perfect stone so the walls would go up well and then they would go out to the sides well. It's the cornerstone from which the whole building was built. It's the old theory. If you begin a journey of a mile, one inch off the path, in one mile you'll be missing the mark by half a mile. Right? So if the cornerstone is a little off, then by the time they build that majestic looking building, the walls are all hanging over here because they were following an imperfect cornerstone. We follow, spiritually, a perfect cornerstone. The foundation of this church, spiritually, if we maintain to the Lord Jesus Christ as our perfect spiritual cornerstone, the foundation will be in line with him. Perfectly in line with him. I can't actually say that because we will always be imperfect. It will be as close to his will as we can get if we maintain ourselves as living sacrifices unto the Lord, if we are the living stones that are spoken of. Christ is the living cornerstone of God's temple, rejected by people, chosen by God, and you are the living stones that God is building into his temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem chosen for great honor." He is the one who is honored. He is the one who is worshipped. He is the one who is perfect. He is the one to whom we turn to find our direction as individuals and as a

church. He is the one to whom we turn for the foundation of our families, our marriages, for the foundation of our congregation, and the fellowship and the unity that we have. We turn to his perfect will. He is the perfect cornerstone. The foundation of your own life, the foundation of the life of this church, and the foundation of the life of the church universal is based on his perfection. If it was anything else, then his church as his bride, pure and unblemished at the time of his coming, would not be a thing. Good Lord knows we as human beings have done enough to damage that whole concept. We as human beings through the influence of the opposer of God's will have done enough to take the name Christian and drag it through the mud and turn it into a clown show. Lord knows that we as humans have done by the influence of Satan enough. That's what I said a hundred times before. You will be very hard pressed in the world to find anybody who hasn't heard the name Jesus Christ because it is attached to every obscenity and every vulgarity that human beings can come up with. Somebody walking through that door has heard the name Jesus Christ, to be sure. And that perfection to which we strive, I've been telling you a couple of stories from my past, the coaching and so forth. This is one from my cooking days. Yes, I've had several incarnations. Folks, forgive me. I just went, "Don't go get your woman." Several iterations of my career development. And this one I learned very young from an amazing woman named Teddy Howarth. And I got my first job cooking at the Farmer's Market restaurant in the early 80s. And Teddy gave me my first job. And as a teenager, I would be hyper annoyed because I do. I love, I like to clean. I like to keep clean. I like clean things. Like I was the guy in the kitchen. I was very proud of that kitchen. And as a developer, anyway, the state inspectors would come in and I don't know if you've worked in food service in a professional kitchen, but those guys are professional jerks. I mean, they've got their measuring tool out. How far is your trash can away from the flat top? Is the lid open more than three inches? We'll check in the grease. Every nook, every cranny, every everything there is a regulation for. And you never get out of that inspection unscathed. They will come, even if you have the cleanest kitchen that you think, they will come with a list of 12 things. And I'm like, you guys. But then Teddy taught me a lesson. Kitchen is very important for that kitchen to be clean. So people, lots of people don't get sick. So the inspectors come in and they see what? Perfection. Knowing that what they will get if we are willing is going to be good. I carried that over to football coaching and we would take my position and we would drill and drill and drill. And I wasn't drilling. And I would always talk about this concept that we're shooting for perfection. Be perfect, be perfect, be perfect. Knowing that we couldn't, but pushing for it every day and drilling, not just so we could drill the skill, but drilling so that the guys would get it in their head, that they're going to shoot for perfection, every block, every play, everything that they do, knowing that what they did happen to come up with would be good. So it is a thing. Now we carry that over to the church world. And here I am again, teaching the same thing. Here's the cornerstone, the perfect cornerstone. You want to know how to be a good follower of Christ? He tells you. Do you want to know how to be a follower of Christ? He tells you. Do we want to know how to behave as a church? We are told. He is the perfect cornerstone for our worship, for our own spiritual sacrifice in prayer and music and in learning the word. He is perfection. And as we submit ourselves as those living stones upon which this church is built and we seek that perfection, what we will be is good, faithful followers of Jesus Christ. We're never going to be Jesus Christ. They're not going to put me at the other end of the building as another cornerstone. But what I pray to be and hope to be is a good, faithful follower of Jesus Christ by learning, by growing, by becoming. So you see the cornerstone is essential, absolutely essential, physically as we've talked about in context and spiritually. If he's not who he says he is, then we're a cult that's worshipping a dude that has performed the greatest folks in human history. I mean, I've done away with a lot of my arrogance over the course of my life, but I don't think I'm that stupid. Verse seven, and we'll finish this out. Yes, you trust him. You who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, the stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. And he is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they do not obey God's word. And so they meet the faith that was planned for them. But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people, a royal priest, a holy nation, God's very own

possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people, now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy, now you have received God's mercy. There's that concept again. Identity. And we talk about this fairly regularly as well. Identity is a tool of the opposer of God's word because every human being wants to know there's an innate desire. Who am I? Why am I here? Why am I conscious? I can think all these different things. There's an innate desire for that knowledge. Do I have a purpose? And Satan takes that and just look out, look out, look anywhere. Satan takes that and twists it and turns it and shakes it and bakes it. And people believe all kinds of things and all, and they're just deceived. When you're outside of God's will, you're just deceived. You're deceived by the opposer of God's will, who knows that it is God's will for you to know who you are as a son or a daughter of the Most High. He knows that you have that desire. He's going to take that desire, big, hard left turn. Nope. You're not a man, you're a woman. You're not a woman, you're a man. You're this, you're that. Give me 17 different identifiers before my first name. Give me 17 different acronyms or letters for the community of which I am a part and of which I identify. This is a powerful and essential concept to the human being. And that is why it is so skillfully, we are so skillfully deceived by the enemy within. Same along with our greed, our desire for money and power. Enemy just works on that. Our sexual desire and sexual drive, enemy just works upon that. These are powerful forces in the life of a human. Don't you think Satan knows that? Takes it, twists it, changes it, turns your face away from the truth. But I digress. Not really. Once you receive no mercy, now you have received God's mercy. And these are those things I spoke of earlier when we're talking about it's God. It's God's love, it's God's peace, it's God's hope, God's mercy, God's grace. Only God can provide and He can only provide this if He is who He says He is. And He says He is the perfect cornerstone of our lives. We can build our lives on Him. We can build this church on Him. The church universal can build itself on Him because He is who He says He is. God's, again, simple terms, dear friends, I warn you as temporary residents and foreigners to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Not your body, not your buildings, not your jobs, your souls. Satan will use any one of those things to get to your soul. He will use a diagnosis that you have to get to your soul. He will use a financial crisis that you are experiencing to get to your soul. He doesn't care about you at all. He wants to destroy you. And so as we're led in this great greedy lustful desire for things and for people, we think this is great. The Psalms are full of it. I'm prospering as I am walking with Satan. This is fantastic. Enjoy it now. This is the only, only joy you will ever experience in your existence. If you think that is joy, it's the only happiness you will ever experience, Christ says. Enjoy it now. Everything is about your soul. And this is where everything the past year or so has just been converging in my life. It's everything is about your soul. Everything is spiritual. And many of the things that we experience in the physical are just tools. Tools that we can lay claim to and submit at the feet of the master or tools for Satan to grab hold of and twist us and turn us every which way away from the cross. This stuff, whatever, this stuff is for it. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors, that even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior and they will give honor to God when he judges the world because you feel like I'm in Bible thumping today because you may be the only Bible some people ever read. If you're a Christian today, do what Peter Duncan says, act like it. It's not walking science. If you're a Christian today, act like it. I don't know how, yes you do. Yes you do. Yes you do. And if you don't have one of these things, you're like, I really don't know. There's a dozen of them over there. Take one home and then you will ask your questions. God bless you guys. Thank you for building the spiritual foundation of this church from which I preach and from which each one of you goes and lives the truth of your salvation, lives in the hope of your salvation, shares the light of Christ in the darkness just because of who you are, a son or a daughter of the most high God. Amen.