

Our Rest in the Rock
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We spend all of this time...

...building, building, building.

Structuring our lives into something specific.

Something we feel represents all of the hidden stuff of our self, inside.

We pile different pieces together---

--our job, our relationships, our work in the community,

Reaching higher and higher toward something...

Sometimes we know what it is we're grasping for...

...but then we reach it, and we're no longer sure.

We start to wonder if there's something else. Something even higher.

So we either keep building on what we had, or we tear it all down and start fresh,

structuring ourselves and the details of our lives in ways different from before.

Building again. Something new. For the sake of touching just a little higher into our hopes.

...All of those things above us, we can't yet see, but want to touch. Want to feel in our lives.

Though the choice is never easy,

sometimes we do purposely tear down what we've built, ourselves.

---Intentionally, with thought, out of a need to rework our lives

and the way we are in the world.

But there are those other times, when everything we've built---

---everything we've stacked and prepared---

Just falls apart. Breaks down. Far past anything we'd ever choose on our own.

Sometimes things fall apart because they just weren't sturdy enough, to begin with.

Things didn't fit quite right: our talents were directed into dead-end projects,
or we held on too long to toxic relationships.

Sometimes things fall apart because of events or forces in our lives that have never been
a part of what we control in even the slightest of ways:

Experiences of death, or layoffs, or illness, or injury.

And in these moments, we're left shocked,

standing there wide eyed, at the huge mess in front of our feet.

All of that work. All of those moments.

All of our effort and our hopes just completely obliterated before our eyes,
for reasons as random as the direction and force of the wind.

Ok, now, there are those opposite moments, too, right?

Through all of these strange and beautiful hours of our lives,

We're sometimes filled up with a lot of pride when everything works out as planned.

---When all of those pieces come together just right to create something large and sturdy.

Start thinking it had something to do with *us*. [brush shoulders, or show some visual of
being pompous]

... Start really getting into the idea of how *great* we are.

But those times of being just broken down. Confused. Startled. Scared.---

--at the sight of everything we built up for ourselves crumbling to pieces---

Those moments are almost better for us, I think, as horrible as they are,

Because they're more accurate, right?

Pride makes us feel bigger than we are,

but finding things just aren't quite right makes us feel small,

Which is what we actually *are*...so maybe it's strangely a finer, safer place to be.

And that might seem weird, or pessimistic, but I think the thought is actually neither.

Because in those bad moments, when everything we tried to build

on top of everything else collapses, falls apart—

---just like in the aftermath of any serious storm,

what we're left staring at is our *foundation*, right?

---All of that bare boned stuff that really makes us who we are.

All of the basic parts of the soul supporting each of our efforts---

--each of these things we try to make real over the dirt.

What we're left staring at is the very depths of our soul.

And that's something we too often lose sight of as we keep stacking, isn't it?

Sometimes we just stack so much, and scramble so deep into the clutter,

that we lose our understanding of our own selves...

...what's really important to us....what makes us who we are.

This is where our readings lead us, today.

In this sanctuary space of quiet thought, and prayer---inside of God's heart---

---we're invited to ask ourselves these questions:

Where do I stand in this world?

What's at the bottom of all of these things I do? Of all of these thoughts I think?

When all other things fall away, what am I left with? What surrounds me, still?

And what continues holding me up, even when everything else has broken apart?

From Psalm 31:

Be a rock of refuge for me... 3 You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,... for you are my refuge. ...O LORD, faithful God. ...15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. 16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Now, I love the Psalms, because they're some of the most visceral, emotional,

straight-to-the-heart thoughts in the bible,

touching into our fears, and our hopes, and our joy in God.

And this one leads us to this understanding---this *remembrance* of our deepest parts---

---of the love and surety we find in the soul of God who holds us and carries us always,

No matter how high the winds pounding.

No matter how rough the faces watching.

Regardless of who still does or does not lie next to us over the pillows each night.

Regardless of whether or not we can boast, or feel ashamed when mentioning what we *do*

and how much we *own* while passing small talk over forks and plates.

There's a presence in our lives we're so blessed to remember
through some of the moments we're here.

It's something we should remember constantly---and talk to a lot---
--even when things are going well.

(Especially when things are going well.)

But It's something we see so much more clearly when all other things go away.

God, our rock. God, the solid place beneath our feet,
carrying every little thing inside of us as we speak, as we breathe in and out,
...as we do our best to build our lives, again and again, into something beautiful to see.

We actually had more than a few readings recommended for us, this week.

One I didn't include in what [our liturgist] read, this morning,
came from the Book of Acts. Chapter 7.

The story of Stephen.

Do any of you remember what happened to Stephen?

In the Book of Acts, this is a man who was stoned to death for his Christian belief in
God.

The reading is dismal, that's for sure:

Stephen is surrounded by an angry mob and knows he's going to die.

But at the same time, the words are full of hope. Not just for him, but for each of us, too.

See, Stephen's in a place thankfully none of us sitting in this room

have ever experienced *physically*,

but like a lot of us have felt in our own *hearts*, again and again,

he's in a place where nothing is as it should be...

...Surrounded by all of the forces of the world pounding to bring loss and pain.

He's in a place of overwhelming fear and uncertainty---

---of a feverish scrambling to stand straight again in the world,

While being knocked down every time

he thinks he's ready to try lifting himself upright.

And no, **technically** this is not a good moment---it's absolutely horrifying---

---but it's also a beautiful and holy space in time, because in the midst of all of these things,

between all of the ravenous snarls, grimacing mouths, violent shouting,

In middle of these moments of terror, his eyes clear in the sight of God.

Stephen, as his world is falling apart, is suddenly filled

with the peace of the presence of the holy,

And everything else becomes just noise in the background,

As he feels his soul lifted and carried

from the mess by the strength of the Life which made him.

As everything else fell apart, he was reminded of the force underlying all things.

And God---his foundation. His rock. His sure place of the soul---saves him.

Not because Stephen's attackers go away,

But because Stephen is now filled with *peace* in the midst of *pain*.

In the sight of God, Stephen actually prays for his attackers...

...Now overtaken with a sense of *love*, though surrounded by *hate*.

In the midst of his struggles, he finds *rest* in feeling God's embrace all around him,

And all of those things hurting him disappear from his experience of the world,

As he's released by his experience of his God.

Where do we find our strength?

When everything else falls apart, what's left in front of our eyes to see?

What brings peace to your soul, in the midst of pain?

Our reading from I Peter talks about God being this rock---this foundation---also.

In the letter, God is called the "living stone."

---That precious Life of all things over which every part of us is built to stand.

...But we don't need to read those words to know this to be true, do we?

It's something we have the ability to experience through any given moment of our lives,

If we're willing to open the eye of our soul wide to the truth underlying all things.

This peace of God is ready to be felt, at any moment, all around us,

If we just reach out from inside, to feel. To sense. To hold and be held.

How many times have you, in your life, felt so overwhelmed by what was happening,

Your only reaction was to find a quiet space to talk with God---to pray.

Past the words we see on these pages, we know this truth of God for ourselves,

In our own living moments in the living world.

From own relationship with God---our own experience of God's company---we know

That in that pitch dark behind our eyes, we become soaked,

and warmed, and soothed in the glory of the light of holy.

And that when we open our eyes from that space, despite all of the clutter,

no matter those fallen pieces scattered around us,

We're able to look into the world---into our own self---

--with a clarity and understanding unknown to us just the moment before.

As human's we're bound up in a world of constant change,

But always, beneath all things is the beating heart of God.

Inside all moments is the unending, unchanging love of God---

---your friend. Your support. Your stronghold. Your rock.

So let yourself find rest, there.

Let God's peace seep deep into your soul as you remember who you are,

and what's important to you in this life.

When all of the tall stuff we've built comes crashing down,

Let's rejoice in the fact that we're just small, and that something so much larger,

so much stronger than ourselves holds us up through every moment.

Amen.