

**Psalm 31 v 1-5 and 15-16 1 Peter 2 v 2-10 John Gospel 14 v 1-14**

**The Lord our Rock**

In the name of the father, son and holy spirit Amen

3 men were out on a boat fishing when all of the sudden the first man said "uh oh I forgot my fishing box!" so he stepped out of the boat and walked on the water back to shore. Then the second man said "Oops! I forgot to call my wife to say I was fishing!" so he got out of the boat and walked to shore. By now the third man had seen enough and so he got out the boat and promptly sank in the water.

On shore the second man said to the first man "do you think we should have told him where the stepping stones are?"

Today in our readings there are mentions are stones and rocks specifically in every passage apart from in the gospel. Even in the alternative reading from genesis Noah's boat lands on a rock that is part of the Ararat Mountain range. It seemed that is what I needed to preach about!

In biblical lands there were many high cliffs and crags. The Israelites often found themselves hiding from their enemies in caves and mountain crevices. Considering the many battles fought in Israel, rocky areas were also ideal locations for strong, protective city fortresses. So starting to use the word rock in association with God seemed to be a natural progression.

Moses was the first in Scripture to use the word "rock" in a figurative sense in connection with God. Others in Israel would speak of God in the same figurative way. Hannah sings praise that there is no other rock like our God in 1 Samuel. In fact the word "rock" is used about twenty-four times in the book of Psalms with reference to God.

We are perhaps comforted by the words, "The Lord is my shepherd," but what about the thought, "The Lord is my rock"?

One of the advantages of being born in the 70's was the fact that I was brought up on great music. One of those music greats was Simon and Garfunkel, a particular favourite of mine even today.

Amongst their songs they had one that stood out when I was looking at the readings for today. Here are some of the lyrics:

I am a rock, I am an island  
 And a rock feels no pain - And an island never cries  
 I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain  
 its laughter and it's loving I disdain - I am a rock, I am an island

And I wonder if the idea we have of the Lord being our rock is a positive or negative one. I wonder if it is something we have ever thought about? What does it mean that the Lord is our rock?

Do we see the Lord our rock as someone who feels no pain - or perhaps chooses to avoid it? A God who dislikes friendships, who has built walls and pushes people away? A serious immovable God who dislikes laughter or avoids loving?

Or is it that you see it as a positive idea:

God as our source of strength in times of distress and danger. God as our refuge.

We may want to hide in the cleft of "the Rock." God will care for us.

Or perhaps we see a God whose ways and justice are perfect and are as solid as a rock.

Maybe it comforts you to think of our Lord the rock as unchangeable.

(slow) The gospel today tells us that The Lord is the way, the truth and the life.

All of that incorporated in a rock.

I believe the Lord our rock is a real, loving and deeply caring, hands-on God. One who dives into our life if we let him. One who is waiting to get involved and feels pain. One who cries with us, for us and for others.

I had the experience about 5 years ago of going on a tour of the British museum with a Biblical scholar and archaeologist. He took us round and made the bible stories come alive as he showed us ancient pottery and jewellery.

He told us that the ancient Greek word translated as "carpenter" was Tekton. And he suggested that the meaning of Tekton at the time of Jesus might actually be someone worked with stone and wood - a person who builds houses. And this sparked my imagination on what I believed Jesus did as a job before the start of his ministry.

The archeologist went on to explain his theory that as Nazareth was a growing town when Joseph moved his family there it makes sense that part of the reason would be so Joseph and eventually his sons had plenty of work.

There might be an indication from Jesus's parables too - there is only one that mentions wood (the one about the speck and the plank in your eye) but quite a few about building and rock - as if they were more familiar to him.

This is only a speculation but if Jesus was a constructor of houses he would know very well what it meant to build your house upon the sand and the rock and would know exactly what he meant when he called Peter his rock on which he will build the church. It was exciting to imagine this differently.

Whether or not this theory was right, it may be a useful idea to start to see the Lord our rock as the cornerstone, the starting stone to the church, but also now as the builder.

Simon spoke at the APCM the Annual Church Meeting about us as a church.

Yes, Jesus is the foundation stone, but Simon reminded us that in the end the people are the church, and it's your love and faith and prayer which the Lord will use to build with.

In the New Testament as Jesus begins His ministry, His disciples and others still do not understand that Jesus is going to be the saviour they had been promised. But after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, all doubt is removed. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples' bold preaching demonstrates their certainty that Jesus truly was this same Rock. Peter preaches, "Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone'"

As we move along as a church the truth that Jesus was there from the beginning as the cornerstone and continues to be alongside us as the builder should reassure and strengthen us.

The Lord needs to be the rock, the cornerstone of our faith and church; and he also needs to continue to be the builder, building us, repairing us and renewing us.

Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple...

You are God's own people... chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.

As a church as we invite and welcome others, as we grow physically and spiritually and as changes happen within the church and outside of the church; (slow) if we look to the Lord as our rock and the builder we will move forward in new and exciting ways.