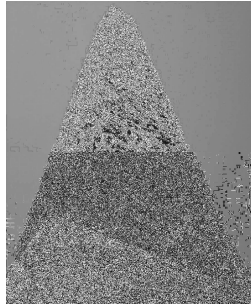


MONUMENTS OF FAITH



WE ARE ALL MONUMENTS TO SOMETHING

**If you are worried about how you will be remembered,
you have probably already been forgotten -- Bobke Roll**

Jacob's Ladder

Genesis 28

(After his dream of a ladder reaching up to heaven) Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel (meaning "house of God.") ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²²and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house...



Do you remember singing "Jacob's Ladder" at camp? None of us really understood what it was about, but it was slow and repetitious enough that we learned the words easily and tried to sing some harmony. At night around a campfire with sparks spitting up into the starry sky, Jacob's Ladder was just right. We could almost see it.

The Biblical story of Jacob's Ladder is a fanciful depiction of angels running back and forth on a ladder that connects heaven and earth. One of the great Gothic Churches in Bath, England has a depiction of this ladder on the facade, and there is a sculpture of it beside a highway in Israel. Both are very literal ladders, and the winged angels are inviting, not frightening, as angels can be sometimes.

Bet let's give this story the deeper meaning that was intended. We continue to believe that God communicates with people. The angels on the ladder symbolize a connection that might be made.

Who are the angels who have brought God's word to you? Maybe there have been missing rungs in your ladder, but somehow the words of the Lord get through to us. But the real meaning is in what comes next.

"Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel ... God's house."

GOD'S EARTHLY ADDRESS

Jacob built God's first house on earth. Nice work Jacob!

The stone that was set in place was tall like a monolith. It marked a location that was about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. The city of Bethel grew in importance, and is often mentioned in the scriptures.

Following the Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant was kept at Bethel for a period of time, until it was

moved to a more permanent location underneath the Temple Mount at the very center of Jerusalem. The stones of the temple were larger, the construction was more sophisticated, but the meaning was the same – “House of God.”

STANDING STONES IN THE HOLY LAND

Standing stones were erected after that throughout the Holy Land to commemorate spiritual places. I've seen standing stones near Tel Aviv, and I know they are standing near Ashdod to the south. There are standing stones in Galilee, and there are standing stones at the entrance to the Holocaust Museum that were erected more recently.

If you and I were traveling together, and we spotted a standing stone, I would shout out to the bus driver, “Pull over, right here!” And we could get out, and take your picture beside a standing stone. At the end of the day, we would look at your picture, and I would ask you, “What does it mean to you to be standing by a place where a monument was erected to celebrate a spiritual experience of God that is recorded in the Bible?”

What would you say? Would be moved?

The testimony of a standing stone would mean something to me. And I would wonder about the places in my own life where I was sure that I was standing on Holy Ground. From time to time, I would want to go back to that place.

CHRISTIAN STONES

Stones are frequently part of the New Testament narrative as well.

Matthew 4:3 The tempter came and said to Jesus, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’

Matthew 7:9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?

Matthew 18:6 ‘If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.’ When Jesus said that a person who corrupts children should have a millstone lashed to his neck, he was talking about a two-thousand pound wheat or olive grinding stone that would have surely taken the person to the

bottom of the lake. Jesus was serious about not corrupting the lives of children.

Perhaps the most famous stone of all:

Mark 16.3: They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ The answer may be that an angel rolled it.

JESUS THE ARTISAN

Like his father, Jesus was a stone mason working in the city of Sepphoris near Nazareth. The translation of carpenter is inaccurate for his occupation; a better word would be artisan, or tradesman, who works with many materials. In the Holy Land, the most plentiful material for building is stone. In our scriptures today, “the Stone that the builder rejected became the keystone for a new faith.”

MONUMENT AMONG US

But we don't have to travel to the Middle East to discover monuments about what is important to people. There are monuments throughout our nation and throughout our city that remind us of who we are, and what is important to us. Maybe you've seen some. In a minute I'm going to suggest that you are a monument.

I walked among the standing stones of Gettysburg two weeks ago. Union Victory at Gettysburg preserved the Union of States, and lead to the abolition of slavery. Something important happened there, and the unfinished stones, the grave markers, and the polished statues speak out in spiritual ways even though they are made of stone.

SANTA ROSA SCULPTURE – “CYCLISK”

Have you seen the new marker in Santa Rosa? It is an obelisk made from old bicycles. It's like the Obelisk of the Washington Memorial in Washington DC, which is also like the Egyptian Obelisk in France. And in the Holy Land there is a stone mosaic of an obelisk that was used to record the depths of the floods of the Nile River, so that people would be able to anticipate the crop cycle.

One of the Santa Rosa car dealers compared our obelisk to “putting a hot dog stand beside a fine restaurant.” Others however know that Santa Rosa is a bicycling vacation destination, and promotes alternative kinds of transportation. Maybe it should have been located near the beginning of the Santa Rosa Creek bicycle trail system, but there is already a big fish there, so the logical spot was not available.

Each of us is a monument to our way of life.

Each of us is a standing stone: a stone of faith, a stone of leadership, a stone where compassion is remembered.

We are monuments to the problems we have faced; we are the keystones for the families of which we have been a part, and the accomplishments we leave behind.

And we carry the millstones of mistakes we have made, that we never seem to put down.

I like this analogy of “stones” and “monuments.”

I quoted Bobke Roll, one of my favorite philosophers, who said, “If you are worried about how you will be remembered you have probably already been forgotten.”

He's right if we are doing pretentious things to make a name for ourselves. But he's wrong if we are active in molding faith, strengthening our community, and reaching out to those in need. And the standing stones will come, if they are warranted.

WE CAN BE “STANDING STONES”

Some of the most inspiring “standing stones” are those people who have encountered great challenges.

- On television, there was a young woman who was the first Miss America to have a handicap. I think she was selected because her hard work is inspirational to others. Her motivation was grounded in her religious faith.
- Howard Rice from seminary.
- This week I saw a minister stand tall who was accused of a violation of the Book of Order for uniting in marriage people of the same sex. She was found guilty. No surprise. She said she did it because she believes that

there are no second class citizens in God's kingdom, and that the same urges that bring together people of different genders to marry, bring together people of the same gender ... perhaps 10% of the time. She said the model for her compassion was Jesus Christ, and that her call to ministry took her to a minority of people who needed a minister too. She has my respect, and admiration, and I think I have hers. I think there are still some things that I have left to learn.

We are monuments to the problems we have dealt with.

THE MONUMENT

Adapted by JHC

Before God sent children to earth, God gave each of them a very carefully selected package of problems. “These,” God promised, “are yours alone. No one else may have these blessings. These problems will belong to you alone.

“And only you have the special talents and abilities that will be needed to make these problems your servants. Know that I love you beyond measure. These problems that I give you are symbols of that love. The monument that you make of your life with the help of these problems will be a symbol of your love for me, Your God and Creator.”

Remember the standing stones in your own life that testify to Jesus Christ and remind you that something special happened in your heart. As you remember, know that you, too, are the marker for Jesus Christ in someone else's life, that something special can happen here through you.

The Bible says the monuments to our problems are precious. “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” that's Jesus Christ, whose name we cherish. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Different as we are, Jesus has brought us into community to live as the people of God.

QUOTING CHRIS SMITH, PRESS DEMOCRAT

Chris Smith of the Press Democrat says, “Got lunch plans today? If not, treat yourself and eat your sandwich alongside Santa Rosa Avenue in southern Santa Rosa while you take in the city's

soaring, gorgeous new piece of public art. The artists made no money on "Cyclisk" because they decided after submitting their concept that the piece had to be taller and more imposing than they'd first conceived it to be."

"We wanted to give the city a landmark," the artists said.

"We are a city where people pay thousands of dollars to rent a bicycle, ride through the back roads and vineyards, and stay at a hotel. Professional cyclists train and race here. We are a leader in alternative transportation, electrical cars, and research."

Chris says, "I would say they've succeeded."

THE MONUMENTS TO OUR OWN VALUES

More important, what are the monuments to our own faith? Maybe your church will be a monument to faith that serves generations far into the future. Maybe we can provide hope and assistance to some minority by a life well lived, and love well shared, a school, a neighborhood, a scholarship, and being a good example.

We are all building monuments to something. Build well.

Abraham Lincoln said with a wink, "Whatever you are, be a good one."

**YOU ARE STANDING STONES.
STAND TALL FOR GOOD THINGS.
STAND TALL FOR JESUS CHRIST.**



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