

**Cornerstone***5<sup>th</sup> in a series on Peter's Principles*

1 Peter 2: 4-10

05-17-2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

**Introduction**

This morning we are celebrating the culmination of the **Cornerstone** capital stewardship campaign. Three years ago we met across the street for a combined worship service and celebratory brunch. Church members pledged over \$2.1 million towards the capital campaign. Your ongoing generosity has enabled us to completely renovate the Sanctuary and the Education Building. We now have a first class ministry center that will serve generations to come.

When I first entered the ministry, I dreamed of leading a church in a construction project. For the life of me, I don't recall why! Be careful what you pray for. In the past decade, I have been involved in four major construction projects in two congregations. The aggregate total exceeds \$11.4 million in new construction or renovation.

I'm not saying that I'm burnt out—but I am certainly singed around the edges! However, the experience has been a blessing, and I have encountered the Holy Spirit in unexpected ways along the way. I have been reminded time and again that Jesus Christ IS the chief cornerstone of our faith.

**I. On This Rock**

One day Jesus and the disciples were traveling near **Caesarea Philippi**. Along the way, Jesus asked his friends: "*Who do people say I am?*" The disciples repeated the rumors they had heard: "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*"

Then Jesus asked: "*But what about you? Who do you say that I am?*" In the pregnant silence, Simon answered: "*You are the Christ, the son of the living God!*"

Jesus said: "*Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven. And I tell you that you are **Peter**, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" (Matthew 16: 13-18)

Simon's nickname came from the Greek word *petros* which literally means *rock*. The church was built on the foundation of Peter's confession. Ephesians 2: 20 declares that the church is "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*"

Years later Simon Peter recalled that scene outside Caesarea Philippi when he wrote his first letter to the church. In 1 Peter 2, Peter called Jesus "*a chosen and precious cornerstone*" upon which the church is built. Then he said that believers "*also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*"

Every Christian is a part of the church that extends beyond space and time. In *The Apostles Creed*, we profess our belief in "*the holy catholic church.*" This is "catholic" with a small "c"—we believe in the **church universal**. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are adopted into God's family with many brothers and sisters. This

“communion of saints” includes all believers. The book of Hebrews recognizes the “*great cloud of witnesses*” that encompasses us.

Although we belong to the church universal, we also belong to a **particular congregation**. We all need a church family that supports us in our spiritual walk. **Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church** is our community of faith. Every time someone joins our church family, we renew our vows to support it with our “*prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.*” Today we celebrate what it means to be God’s people at Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church. We remember our past, rejoice in the present, and anticipate the future.

## II. The Past

Sam Jones certainly enjoys a rich **history**. God is the Lord of history—history is “*His Story.*” The Christian church has been in business under the same management for almost two thousand years. Our own congregation is much younger, observing its **171<sup>st</sup>** birthday this year. In **1838**, Ebenezer Methodist Church was founded on a hill where Oak Hill Cemetery is located today. A log building served as the first sanctuary.

As the population grew, the church relocated 10 years later (**1848**) to be nearer the center of town and the railroad. The members built a wooden building at our present location. The church eventually changed its name to Cartersville Methodist Episcopal Church South.

The congregation grew along with the community. In **1872**, the old sanctuary was demolished and a larger, brick building took its place, complete with a 100 foot spire. Thirty years later, however, the church was experiencing still more growing pains. So they once again demolished the old building and built a new place of worship in **1906**.

The pews and part of the altar rail in today’s sanctuary were preserved from the 1872 building. We sing the hymn words, “*Brothers we are treading where the saints have trod.*” Well, we are sitting where the saints have sat for 137 years! :)

Another name change happened in 1906. **Sam Jones** was a prominent Methodist evangelist of the past century. Historians have often called him “*the Billy Graham of his time.*” The Cartersville native preached revivals across the United States. He died unexpectedly in 1906 as the sanctuary was being completed. The congregation voted unanimously to change the name to Sam Jones Memorial.

Other changes to the physical plant occurred over the years. The church needed a fellowship hall and more class rooms. In **1933**, the basement was hand-dug by church members with picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows. Then in **1960**, the three story education building was added with a chapel and bride’s parlor.

The story of expansion continued in the 1990s when the church began purchasing additional property across the street. In **1998**, the church embarked upon its first capital campaign in recent memory with Awaken to the Adventure. A second campaign in **2002** called Building Our Faith enabled us to build the 32,000 square foot Family Life Center that was completed in November 2003. The Cornerstone campaign enabled us to renovate the Education Building and Sanctuary.

Our congregation has been involved in three capital stewardship campaigns in the past 11 years. Members have pledged a total exceeding \$6.7 million during a time when the general budget has almost tripled. It's been an amazing ride.

Church histories often focus upon **buildings** because they have convenient dates, complete with photographs and stories. They form recognizable milestones along the way. However, defining a church's history by its buildings is like telling the story of *The Declaration of Independence* by describing the furnishings of Independence Hall in Philadelphia! The church is not a building—the church is the people who meet inside a building. A recitation of sites and structures cannot begin to communicate the transformation of countless lives by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Change** has been a constant in our past. We are presently located on our second site and in our fourth sanctuary. Counting on my fingers, I think we are on our sixth name change. Regardless of the time and place, however, the saving news of Jesus Christ has remained the same from age to age.

### **III. The Present**

Sam Jones is blessed to enjoy such a rich heritage of faith. We are here today because of others' faithfulness yesterday. With Christ Jesus as our chief cornerstone, we build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets along with the ordinary men and women who served faithfully in their time and place. Now it is our turn. I believe that God has put us in **this time and place** for a divine purpose.

Some years ago a will filed in Murphy, North Carolina caused quite a stir. A rather eccentric woman left part of her estate "to God." In order to settle the matter, the family filed a law suit naming God as the defendant! The local sheriff was duly appointed to serve the summons. After some time, he brought back this report: *"After due and diligent search, God cannot be found in Cherokee County!"*

If the same search occurred in Bartow County, the sheriff would be well advised to begin at Sam Jones Memorial UMC. God is here and active in our midst.

I have been amazed to watch God's Spirit at work in the nine years that I have been here. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that we have lived in the midst of miracles. The Holy Spirit has stirred all about us.

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|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ➤ Property acquisition | ➤ Sunday School, Disciple, etc. |
| ➤ Family Life Center   | ➤ Wednesday night supper        |
| ➤ Growth in worship    | ➤ Missions                      |
| ➤ Celebration Service  | ➤ Staff                         |
| ➤ Business by the Book | ➤ Budget                        |

There is no room to boast. This is God's doing, and it is marvelous in our sight.

### **IV. The Future**

And God's not done with us. The **future** is brighter than the past and present. To reword Robert Browning's poem, "*Come and grow with us, the best is yet to be!*"

Church consultant, Ken Callahan, says: *The watershed question for many people in many congregations is: Do you believe that your best years are behind you, or do you believe that your best years are yet before you?*" He then goes on to claim: "*Effective, successful churches live in the confidence of God's promise that some of their best years are yet to come.*" (p. xx)

Our community is experiencing unprecedented growth. In the coming months and years, we will have the opportunity to reach an expanding number of people in the name of Jesus Christ.

Dawna Sirard wrote about her long-term marriage. After so many years together, her husband needed reminders about special occasions. On the morning of their 35th anniversary, they were sitting at the breakfast table together. Finally, she said, "Honey, do you realize that we've been sitting in these same two seats for exactly 35 years?" Her clueless husband put down his newspaper, looked at her, and asked, "So, do you want to switch seats?"

It is time to more than switch seats and change places. We have the exciting privilege and humbling responsibility to live at a critical moment in our church's life. It is time to move into future. We stand between two generations. What was and what will be. The past and the future. History and possibility.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote: "*Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I pass on to you as of first importance. (1 Cor. 15:1-3a) "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance."* This is our task as well. Like an old fashioned water bucket brigade, we have received these wonderful gifts of salvation, faith, heritage, and church. Now we pass it on to others.

Today is a special Sunday in our church's life for two reasons. This morning we celebrate the culmination of the *Cornerstone* capital stewardship campaign; however, it is also **Confirmation Sunday** when many of our young people publicly profess their faith in Jesus Christ. The two occasions inform and complement one another.

These sixth graders have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the nurture and encouragement of their families and this church family. Within the walls of this church, they have attended Sunday School and worship, served as acolytes, received Holy Communion and the waters of baptism, laughed and learned at Vacation Bible School, learned how to serve others, and so much more.

Look closely at the faces of our confirmands today. They and others like them are what the *Cornerstone* capital stewardship campaign is all about. What we do today will touch generations to come. What we do today will touch others for an eternity to come.

*Cornerstone* enabled us to completely renovate the sanctuary and education building; but the capital campaign was ultimately not about mechanical systems, carpeted floors, painted walls, and other construction projects. A church building is a means to an end, a tool for ministry. We are really building our Christian faith. The campaign gave us better tools to fulfill our mission statement of “*making disciples of Jesus Christ.*”

### **Conclusion**

In 1906, previous church members dedicated this sanctuary to God’s service. Within this sacred space, countless lives have been forever changed in Christ’s name. In 1960, previous church members completed the education building. Within that sacred space, countless lives have been made disciples of Jesus Christ.

We are building upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles along with men and women who have served God faithfully here at Sam Jones. Now its our turn. We too are living stones being built into God’s house . . . with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.