

Listen to what the Stones are Saying

A Sermon by **Rev. Laurie McKnight-Walker**

Biblical References: 1 Peter 2: 2–10, John 14:1–14

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What are these stones saying to us?

They say many things, sometimes, depending where they are from. Will has loaned me a small collection of his rocks that have important meaning for him. There are two rocks here from Iona, an important Protestant Christian community in Scotland. This sandy red coloured stone is from Petra, an amazing ancient city which he visited in Jordan the year of his retirement from ministry. There are two beautiful rocks from the Canadian Rockies which had been brought to the 1986 General Council meeting held in Sudbury by western delegates. This was the Council when the United Church apology was given to our Aboriginal neighbours.

Rocks can remind us of many things, can't they? Journeys we have taken on cobblestone streets, romantic walks on stony beaches, mountains we have climbed for adventure or for spiritual renewal. The towering rock face at Bon Echo park reminds us of our native ancestry through the enduring art work that is etched on them.

What are these stones saying to us?

Sometimes they speak to us about what is contained within them, hooking our desire for wealth and power. They might contain rivers of gold or silver, copper or nickel, or uranium ore. Uranium of course is of great interest to people for several reasons – its high degree of radioactive material is processed into fuel which is used in nuclear reactors giving us nuclear energy, which has been with us for only a brief 50 years or so. The depleted uranium they have discovered can be used for weapons, and small amounts of uranium are used for medical purposes.

Most of us are unhappy with how uranium has been used in the production of atomic bombs, which we know causes catastrophic human and environmental damage (ie the destruction of the planet) and are not comforted by the fact that depleted uranium is used in weapons production today. Now that the possibility of uranium mining could occur in our own neighbourhood, north of Sharbot Lake, many more people are now waking up to the real destruction of the soil, trees, waters, plants and animals and human beings which will occur when strip mining for uranium destroys all of that creation.

Through the Citizens Inquiry into Uranium Mining which was held in our church hall recently, more people, including myself, are becoming more aware of the complete entitlement that has been given to prospectors to mine for the rocks and minerals that lie beneath the surface of the earth.

Most of us thought that when we bought a piece of property, that we actually owned it, could preserve it and enjoy it, respecting the laws of the land. The original owners, in our local region, the Algonquin, also thought they still owned the land, had valid treaty rights or at least would be allowed to be responsible for its care and survival. Many of us are questioning why it should be considered a criminal act to even question the absolute entitlement that those who seek to exploit what is under the soil currently have in most of our country, especially when the use of uranium, costly to mine and process, is very much in need of public discussion and re-evaluation.

Listen to what the rocks are saying to us?

Who created them in the first place? So many of the psalmists in the Hebrew scriptures saw

God's handiwork in the very substance of the earth. Psalm 19 begins "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork". From our psalm 36 which we prayed today – "Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord." In our scriptures, the Lord is often referred to as the rock of our salvation, the strong fortress, the rock in whom we trust. It is clear that our Judeo-Christian religion is not about strictly spiritual matters that are cut off from nature, but that nature and the earth itself embodies the very glory and being of God.

There is a wonderful new field of research called Cosmology that comes in two forms – scientific and cultural. The science of cosmology refers to the study of the universe as a single, dynamic, and ongoing event. It looks at the large-scale structure of the universe from the great Flaring Forth to the formation of galaxies and our own solar system. Brian Swimme, a current writer and thinker, takes it beyond science and tells the story of this process as a sacred story. This ongoing process of creation is not only happening 'out there' on the large scale universe, but it is also happening 'within' each person who is part of the creation.

There is much to say and learn about this new cosmology, but what we can affirm is that there are two sacred stories for us as Christians – the one told by creation itself and the one found in our written text, our Bible. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, he didn't say, "Holy, holy, holy God, the whole *bible* is filled with your glory". The shattering insight that came to him was that the whole *earth* was filled with the Holy One's glory. The story of creation sets the context for the sacred text of scripture.

So where do stones come from? How did they get here? Scientists who speculate about the origins of our universe refer to a specific event called the Flaring Forth, when some 13.5 billion years ago, before time or space existed, the early universe flashed into existence. This was when the source, the Holy One, began the long journey of manifesting in the realm of time and space. Dr. Sallie McFague invites us to think about the entire cosmos as the incarnate presence of the divine. She explores the meaning of the created universe as the *body* of God.

An important law of the universe was established at the time of the Flaring Forth, first act of creation, and that is that the *universe is expanding*. We're alive to tell this story because of the precise rate of expansion set in place in the first milliseconds of creation. This expanding of the universe is the great discovery of Einstein, captured in his famous General Theory of Relativity. So the universe as a whole is developing, it is going somewhere.

After several epochs of time, there emerged atoms and gravity, allowing hydrogen and helium to cluster together into a trillion huge clouds. After a billion years, these would condense into the galaxies. It is suggested that there are 100 billion galaxies and 100 trillion stars. Our local cluster of galaxies is Virgo, and our own home galaxy, the Milky Way, is one of a 1000 galaxies. We're approximately two-thirds of the way out towards the edge of Virgo. Home sweet home. Indeed, Jesus was onto something when he says, "in my Father's house there are many rooms."

Our earth is the result of exploding stars, supernova, which contained all of the elements essential for life on earth – oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen. We are literally made from this stardust. As Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, "the only difference between us and trees or rocks and chickens is the way in which these elements are arranged." After just the right amount of matter, heat from the sun, gravity, gases and elements, the rocks of the earth were formed.

Years followed in which our earth was bombarded with meteors, and then the lightning came. Have it last a few million years flashing over the waters of the earth that sparked life into being, beginning the long journey in which creatures of all kinds came into being, developed and grew.

What is unique about human beings is our consciousness, in that we are aware that we are aware.

There are many complex conditions that were required, and are required in order to make life happen. The more that scientists and theologians piece together about how it all happened, one cannot help but be amazed at creation itself, at the divine energy (or will) that made it all happen and keeps it happening.

The energy that keeps it all moving, the principals that keeps life renewing itself, evolving, adapting to new conditions, finding new ways to survive and be strong and vital is the energy we call love or the Holy Spirit. Jesus, truly a child of the universe, born of a human mother, living an earthly life as we do, suffering loss, and death as we will one day, was resurrected by this very power we call love. He was a man who embodied this magnificent power and possibility of creation. Scripture tells how he often went off to the mountains, or out to the rocky desert to renew himself for the work he was called to do. Through prayer, and faithfulness, through giving over his ego to the Creator, and even through the humiliation of death on a cross, Jesus became a living stone, an enduring agent of God's love and spirit.

Peter listens to what the rocks are telling us from his own sacred texts in Isaiah and the psalms and further develops this magnificent image of being living stones. Come to him, to Jesus the Christ, a living stone, precious in God's sight, and let yourselves also be built into a spiritual house, to become living stones yourselves.

What are the stones that have fallen from the walls of this church building saying to us? To find them some mortar, some glue, so they can keep the walls from falling down on our heads? Is that all this is about? If it could be so simple. We are challenged today to become living stones, not simply a building of stone, but a living temple comprised of people, a priesthood of Christ inspired, Christ formed people who care deeply about each other and ourselves, but who also realize how deeply inter-connected we are with this whole creation around us.

Listen to what the stones are saying – together we are stardust. So let us always *praise* God, the Holy One, the ground of our Being, and choose this day to *co-operate* with and celebrate our abundant life in Christ, the living Stone who is still giving life, not just for us, but for all of creation.

Prayer of Dedication

God of all Creation,
in whom we live and move and have our being,
you sent us your son, Jesus,
that we may have life in abundance.

Take our gifts of praise and offerings
and bless them to become sustenance of the work of healing, justice and the restoration of
Creation.

May we be encouraged to work in loving relationship with you in the nurture and restoration of
Creation.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, the firstborn of all creation. Amen