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Have you noticed in our lifetimes how many things have become more portable?

For example, when I first began using a computer in college, the equipment filled an entire room, somewhat like the first computer built in England. Its first calculation occurred in 1949, though it was limited mostly to addition and subtraction, but it filled an entire room.

Something happened a year after I was born that made our technology smaller and faster. The microchip was born in 1961, which led to smaller, portable devices. My laptop computer, for example, has more computing power than those early room-filled computers, and I can carry it with me wherever I go.

My first stereo system had three-foot speakers connected by wires, which meant it had to stay in one room. Now I can use my phone to play music over a Bluetooth speaker that fits in my hand, which means it's portable—I can listen anywhere.

Even food preparation has become more portable, with food trucks offering tasty treats just about anywhere. Many of us have enjoyed port-a-pit chicken and potatoes, cooked on location at many busy intersections.

With all these portable aspects in our lives, we may find the imagery in 1 Peter a bit confusing and somewhat outdated, for the writer quoted the prophet Isaiah and a

Psalm, both referring to a cornerstone, something that is not portable. Isaiah's imagery refers to a solid foundation on which to build, while the Psalm refers to builders rejecting a stone for their construction, which ends up becoming the cornerstone.

Traditionally placed as the first stone in a building project, a cornerstone sets the direction for the rest of the building. One might have rejected a stone if it wasn't the right size or shape or if it had a crack, for a builder searched for just the right stone to set as the cornerstone. Although such a stone may not serve the same purpose today in building projects, nowadays people may fill an ornamental cornerstone with objects, creating a time capsule with memories of when the building was created.

I once served a church and the members decided to move. Some wanted to open the cornerstone and retrieve the historical objects to take to their other building. Others suggested removing the cornerstone and taking it with them for sentimental reasons, for it had the construction date of the church engraved on the stone. Once they investigated the cost and complications of moving or opening the cornerstone, they abandoned the idea, for it would have been too complicated of a task.

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Cornerstones are not portable. They remain in place, and possibly the writer of 1 Peter wanted to reassure his listeners that their faith in Jesus was stable, that nothing could shake their trust in Jesus, that Jesus was a strong foundation, a stable cornerstone.

The writer used the imagery to suggest that even though Jesus was rejected, he became the cornerstone of our trust in God. This cornerstone, however, is different, for Jesus was a living stone, and although rejected and killed for his radical ideas, he continues to be a living stone, building the foundation of a spiritual house.

The writer then used an interesting phrase: “a holy priesthood” in reference to the living stone. A few verses later, the writer echoed the imagery again: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Do you recognize the imagery? It echoes from the Exodus, a time when God’s people had escaped from slavery into freedom. They found themselves at the foot of a mountain, waiting for Moses to ascend and receive the Ten Commandments. Imagine the mixture of emotions: fear of the Pharaoh who had enslaved them, along with

excitement of their newfound freedom and anxiety about their unknown future.

I imagine they wondered, “Now what?” Moses suggested they were now representatives of God’s presence, a royal priesthood, but for the next several generations, they would wander in the wilderness before settling down. They were mobile, not at all like a cornerstone.

When the writer of 1 Peter used the imagery of a permanent, solid, cornerstone, he mixed it with the imagery of a portable people who had wandered in the desert. Two completely different images—stationary and portable. Grounded and wandering. Fixed and mobile.

That prompts me to wonder what kind of church we are like today. Are we more like a cornerstone, grounded and fixed? Or are we wandering and mobile? What are your impressions?

- How many feel our church is fixed and like a cornerstone?
- How many feel we’re mobile and portable?

A few months ago, I listened to small groups of people from Central Christian talking about what we learned about ourselves during all the transitions we have faced, from Covid to selling our building. Numerous people commented, “I learned something during Covid

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when I had to worship without our building. I discovered that church is not the building, but it is the people who worship together. We can worship anywhere, even at home, but what I missed the most were my friends. Now that we are worshipping with First Christian, our church family has grown. It's not the building, it's the people."

In a sense, we have created a portable church, using the foundation of a port-a-stone. Jesus is our cornerstone, not placed in dirt to create a permanent structure, but a portable foundation that moves with us—

- into our homes,
- the places where we work or volunteer,
- in the places we play with our children or grandchildren,
- in the scenic views of mountains or valleys,
- in gardens and rivers,

- into all those places where we worship God, where we offer our joyous expressions of praise and thanksgiving for God's creative presence in our world.

Wherever we are, we represent God's presence in the world, we become God's cornerstone. As English actor Rafe Spall described a way to be a cornerstone:

Being kind is the most important thing I've ever been taught. That's what my parents always told me—more important than ambition or success is being kind to people. The cornerstone of my life. What I aspire to is to be kind.¹

May you be a portable cornerstone, a port-a-stone, representing God's presence beyond the walls of this church or any building, trusting in the foundation of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of our faith in God.

¹ www.brainyquote.com/topics/cornerstone-quotes