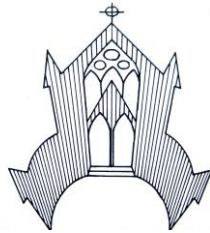


Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 3rd May 2026



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

Creator God, you have made a place for us full of love and acceptance.
You guide us to be your people through Jesus who shows the way.
Bless us, with your truth, to live life in all its fullness.
Lord God, we come to you, our cornerstone.
We want to build on you, becoming living stones.
This building we are in was made by human hands.
If bricks could talk, they'd share many stories.
May we be attentive to all that has gone before,
knowing it has all helped make this into a holy place,
somewhere for us to come face to face with you, Lord God. **Amen**

Lectionary Readings:

1 Peter 2 v2-10 (p1218) The Living Stone and a Chosen People
Psalms 31 v1-5, 15-16 (p559) ... be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Acts 7 v55-60 (p1100) The Stoning of Stephen

John 14 v1-14 (p1082) Jesus Comforts the Disciples/Jesus the Way to the Future

There's A Place For You

Peter encourages Christian communities facing persecution that they are specially called by God and given a new identity as 'living stones', built together like a new temple, supported by Jesus the cornerstone. The believers should keep on trusting and praising God who has shown them light and mercy.

Like the church in 1 Peter, we might question our place in the world and how we navigate life and all its complexities. This week, we learn that even amid our doubts and fears, God has a place for us.

A person who collects rocks and stones from the natural environment is often called a fossicker. Sometimes we can look at rocks or stones and only see something ordinary. Fossickers would say that each rock or stone has its own beauty. However, there are much-sought-after rocks that hold hidden beauty, such as opals and thundereggs (formed through volcanic ash layers). These rocks look like ordinary rock on the outside, and it is only when they are cracked or cut open that their inner beauty is revealed. Sometimes we might feel like 'ordinary stones', unable to be the 'living stones' Peter speaks of. But when God looks at us, he values each one of us as precious, made to be part of his church and to build something for his glory.

The concept of pilgrimage is rooted in the Middle Ages (think Chaucer) but has had a renewed appeal recently with several books and TV programmes centring on a group of people exploring spiritual growth through a journey of discovery. Christian pilgrims have often focused on their destination, a holy island or holy city — a physical place of

special significance. In John 14, Jesus names himself as ‘the Way’, not ‘the goal’. It’s no accident that one of the first names for Christians was ‘people of the Way’. What would it be like to travel on a Jesus-shaped path? Would it be straight or meandering, rough or smooth? What directions might guide us? What might we learn on the journey? The Amazing Race or Race Across the World is a TV show where contestants race through various countries, stopping at places to complete challenges. With minimal money, no GPS and brief directions, sometimes contestants get lost or become frustrated when given vague directions by well-meaning bystanders. Those race contestants who seem to succeed often have people who say, ‘I’ll show you the way’ or ‘I’ll take you there’. In the Gospel reading from John 14:6, Jesus said he is ‘the way, the truth and the life’. Whether we are navigating life’s challenges or seeking answers to those deep questions, we can trust that Jesus is the Way.

Thought for the week

If you’ve ever seen the musical *West Side Story* you might recall the wonderful song, ‘Somewhere’ <https://www.westsidestory.com/somewhere>, which repeats the line ‘There’s a place for us’. The musical is based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, a story about two young people from warring social groups who fall in love. Both feel out of place with where they’ve come from and face further alienation and rejection because of their desire to be together.

The words of that song are a wonderful summary of the Christian call to live differently. It says, ‘We’ll find a new way of living, we’ll find a way of forgiving... Somewhere’.

In one of today’s lectionary passages, 1 Peter 2, Peter is speaking of the Church being a special people, set apart for God. But Peter starts this passage by reminding us that the one we are built upon – our cornerstone, Jesus – was rejected by humans. From his birth, through his ministry and to his death, Jesus wasn’t given a ‘place’ to be. He was

rejected by the religious authorities, by the Roman rulers, and he was even rejected by those closest to him.

Peter reminds us that Jesus overcame that rejection to become the cornerstone on which the Church is built, and that it is built with living stones – that means us! Because of Jesus’ rejection, death and resurrection, we can now be God’s special people, set apart, together. There’s a place for us!

This also means that anyone who faces rejection or loneliness from the world can find a place to belong in God’s church. That might feel like a challenge to us. As with the gangs in *West Side Story*, we can prefer to be with people who we know or seem most like us, or we can assume that those from other social groups won’t want to be around us. God’s church is made up of all of us, misfits who follow the way of this countercultural messiah. We are ‘God’s own people’. We are called to proclaim God’s works and demonstrate his grace, mercy and love. Perhaps as we think about the call to be this chosen people, we might remember the words of ‘Somewhere’ and consider how we might create a place where there is space for all of us, and all who hunger for belonging.

A Sending Out Prayer

Thank you, precious Lord,
that we are called to be living stones.
Confident knowing our place, and generous enough
to go out and live our lives serving others,
helping them to find their place in you.
Go out with the confidence that God has a place for you,
trusting Jesus to show the way,
enabled by the Spirit to live and serve.

Amen.