

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway
May 7, 2023

E=mc² and The Church of Jesus Christ

I never liked the subject of physics in school. I took it when I needed to but I never developed a love for it. Biology, genetics and chemistry. Those were interesting. But not physics. I have found myself however through the years, living with people who have a great appreciation for the subject. My husband, Dave was an engineer by training originally and our youngest daughter, Katherine decided to follow a similar path.

With these technical minded folk in our family, not infrequently we have found ourselves gathered around a dinner table having some pretty interesting conversations about tenets of science and tenets of faith.

Not long ago, we were talking about Albert Einstein and his theories on special relativity. (I think the conversation may have started when we were remembering about a special friend of ours in the congregation I served in Santa Cruz who passed away not long ago. She used to tell me stories of growing up in Princeton, NJ and living near Einstein and how, when she was young the neighborhood kids would all go to ‘Albert’ for help with their math homework.) I love that story.

It was this conversation around our dinner table about Einstein and what he discovered and how it changed the way we think about time, space and how the world works, that came to mind for me as I was thinking about our text for this morning. I think it is all this talk, in the text, about us being living stones that make up the church of Jesus Christ in the world. The fact that we are all here at STONE Church of Willow Glen, didn’t get by me either. Living stones - physics and faith coming together. What an intriguing thought.

My family was impressed with how Einstein published 3 papers over the course of one year. The year was 1905. My physics minded family members were talking about how revolutionary were the ideas contained in those papers. Einstein’s theories on relativity, on the way objects interact with one another, were so

counterintuitive, so far out in terms of what people experienced that for years people dismissed his ideas. Eventually the scientific community came to accept what Einstein said and his understandings *did* change the way we think of space and time.

One of the most well known equations to come out of Einstein's study of relativity is the equation, $E=mc^2$. Essentially this equation says that E or energy equals the mass of an object times the speed of light squared. Or more simply put, energy can be converted to mass or substance, and mass can be converted to energy. Mass, substance, and energy are really two forms of the same thing. It occurred to me this week that Einstein and the author of First Peter seem to share a knack for seeing beyond the surface.

Einstein worked in a world of science and mathematics. He was trying to explain why the world works the way it does. He was considering time and space and how they are related.

The author of First Peter was working in a world of brand new Christians. He was trying to articulate how they work together in the light of the resurrection of Christ. Einstein said there are certain laws at work in the world and that, 'energy can be converted to mass'. The author of 1 Peter said that Christ is at work in the world and that ordinary, regular people can become the church of Jesus Christ. Einstein's concept is difficult to grasp. This one about Christians often seems even more unbelievable.

When I saw that that passage was one of our texts for this morning it occurred to me that maybe this is kind of a 'theme text' for you, Stone Church of Willow Glen. I wonder if some of you who are old timers here have heard lots of sermons on this text, Stone Church of Willow Glen? The passage creates such powerful images, doesn't it?

The author of First Peter here is writing words of encouragement to new and struggling churches. The members of these fledging communities were new to the faith working to learn how to live as Christians in the midst of a culture that was not Christian. They were a powerless and persecuted minority. Sociologists have determined that many of the first Christians were outsiders to begin with.¹ They were the foreigners, manual laborers, slaves, the poor of society. The first Christians were a ragtag bunch. Life was dangerous. It is for these people that the

¹ Lectionary Homiletics, April/May 2005, pg. 37. "Precious People" by Susan R. Andrews.

writer of 1 Peter is trying to find words to express the power of the resurrection, and to emphasize and articulate the distinctive character of the Christian community. The author was trying to answer the question, 'What does my faith matter in this life of mine?'

The answer the people receive is clear and strong. You are God's beloved, precious people, claimed and called. And that makes all the difference.

The author offers metaphors to stir and to encourage. First there is the image of spiritual milk. Just as a new born must have milk to grow, so people of faith must be fed spiritual milk - which in this case is the word of God and the nurturing of the community - in order to grow in faith. Becoming a Christian is not a once and for all event. It is process of growing and changing.

The author then moves to this image of living stones. This is where I found kinship between Einstein and the author of First Peter. Mass can indeed be converted to energy. And people, even an unlikely group of powerless and poor, can become the church. As amazing as it sounds, this is the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That we, all of us, are called to be living stones in the house of God. Mass and energy.

So to the question of, 'does my faith matter?' the answer is it matters a great deal. Being people of faith, resurrection people, means we are claimed by God, precious in God's sight always. And because of that we are changed forever. "Once you were not a people, not now you are God's people."

When these first Christians saw themselves as living stones in the building of the community of faith in their day they also saw themselves as, '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.' Precious in God's sight and called to proclaim God's mighty acts. This is where *who* we are really becomes *what* we are, our mass becomes our energy. Our faith moves from our heart to our hands and feet and voices. This is what it means to be Christian.

You know this. You do it here. A few examples here at Stone include the work for Home First that you will do here in a couple of weeks. Preparing and opening Roycott House for new neighbors in our community. Standing up. Speaking up, for peace and justice issues. Providing meals. Offering words of encouragement. Taking time to pray for our world and our community. Writing letters. You know the list could go on. *Who* we are as followers of Christ can and does *translate, become* what we are, what we are about whenever we do the work of Christ today.

This passage from First Peter can be a troublesome one too though. To our ears this idea of being ‘a chosen race and a holy nation’ can sound exclusive, meant to separate those who are in from those who are out. But this is not the case. To the first Christians these were words meant to empower and to set free, never to build walls or exclude. They are meant to remind us that it is when we feel the love of God we can in turn love others. When we feel the power of God we can in turn risk acting out of our faith.

We don’t live in the same circumstances as the Christians who first received this letter from which we read this morning. We are not the persecuted minority in this country, a religion of the outcast and powerless. And yet, the questions those first Christians were asking are still relevant today. ‘What does our faith matter? What is resurrection influenced behavior today? What does it mean to be people of faith, followers of Jesus Christ?’

It was not easy for those first Christians to see. It is not easy for us sometimes either. But the process of discerning how our faith matters is an important task still. When we hear, ‘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.’ We hear it with different ears than those who heard it first, certainly. But the meaning remains the same. Words of hope and encouragement as we answer God’s call in the midst of our realities to be the church of Christ today.

Einstein had it right. Mass and energy are interchangeable, two forms of the same thing. The author of First Peter had it right also. We are the church, a community and Stone Church of Willow Glen, here on Santa Clara County in 2023. Real and solid, built on the corner stone of Jesus Christ. And, we are also energy, reaching out in service and mission, changing, questioning, welcoming, becoming ever open to where the Holy Spirit leads us. People of faith, people of God alive in Christ here, today. May we be that energy today.