

I'm going to beg your forgiveness ahead of time, but I'm gonna geek out about rocks this morning...again. Now that I've had a shred of distance and revisited the wall I've been working on with longing for summer days, I've gotten some ideas. If the wheels turning in my noggin are any indication, y'all are in for a season of stone sermons. Or, at the very least, stones making regular appearances in sermons. Have no fear, though, I will preach on other stuff, too. It won't be all rocks all the time. But it will be some rocks some of the time.

Last week, I took a friend up to see the wall face-to-face. They were duly impressed, which of course made me feel pretty good. They touched the stones and marveled at the way everything's locked in place. They asked good questions and bragged on my accomplishment. And then they asked how much more I wanted to do. Now, y'all, that's a doozy of a question. I built 50 feet of stone wall over the summer. That 50 feet represents hours of work, tons of stone picked up and put back down again, sweat, blood, tears, and one sacrificed wrist. And I've got 400 feet to go...400 feet in this one section. All told, there's more than 2,700 feet to go. I've built less than 2% of the entire thing. At this rate, I'll finish right about the time St. Peter welcomes me up there at those pearly gates.

There's a weird thing happening, though. The work ahead is not discouraging. It's exciting. I've got half a mile of heavy work ahead of me, and I love it. I can imagine this all might sound overwhelming or maybe even absurd, but for me at least, it's invigorating. I don't know, ask me again when I've finished another 50 feet. Anyway, there's a bunch of life-giving stuff in the work of that wall, but what gets me the most is how big and how small the work is all at the same time. 2,795 total feet, with smoot holes, a few gates here and there, and the occasional arch (assuming I can get the hang of 'em). It's enormous. But the work isn't on that scale. The work's right in front of you. Big stuff is hard to move, but it adds height quickly. Those beastly boulders are impressive. But when you step back, you almost don't see them anymore. They just become a part of the greater whole. Most of the work, though, isn't big and impressive. Most of the work's small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, and when it's all said and done, it's invisible, hidden on the inside, sandwiched between big, visible stones, supporting them, and removing the voids that would eat away at the integrity of the greater whole. By the time I'm all said and done, there shouldn't be a single stone in the entire wall that got there by accident. Every stone has a purpose, every stone individually placed, every stone with a role in the greater whole.

Now, the wall will settle some, stones shift with winter and time. Critters wiggle their way in. And as Radiohead has it, "gravity always wins." Eventually, parts of the wall will give out. But that's not the end of things. It just needs a little attention, a little repair work, a little rebuilding, and time restarts. There's a scale here that's mind-boggling, and it's really cool to be connected to that unfathomable stuff. I'm just a guy creating a little bit of order out of rocks that've been around for more than 6 million of my lifetimes. I get to make something new out of that. And most of the time, that stuff I'm working with is otherwise ignored or inconvenient or even annoying. I don't know that many folks that reflect on the wonder of the ancient after they've dropped a rock on their toes. But there really is an impossible glory to it all.

All that to say, I love that we're out here today, beginning a new season at our church's relatively new altar made from ancient stone. Solomon's temple was the same sort of thing. He reigned thousands of years ago, which feels like an eternity to our minds but meant nothing to the stones he built with. What's a few thousand years to an eon? Solomon's task was enormous. He didn't just build a wall. He built a home, THE home for God. All I've got is chipmunks. Now, granted, he didn't build it himself. He oversaw the work, but still. It happened under his watch, and the result was apparently fabulous. But it was built the same as any structure,

one stone at a time. One beam at a time. One brass bowl. One golden altar. History's lost count of the number of hands that contributed, but it has not lost sight of the glory they created.

At the risk of over-glorifying our little church, I can't help but feel some parallels. We've had some hard years. Y'all know we were absolutely thriving before the pandemic hit. We even took that foundation and maintained some momentum for the first few months, but the gravity of everything happening, the separation from community, the "just not the same-ness" of being online only, it wore on us, and our work shrank. I don't know about y'all, but I went from imagining the enormous things St. Thomas' could do, to rushing from one repair to another, to the hyperfocus of caring for one tiny stone at a time. So much has happened in the last four years, but we're still here. We've constructed an amazing foundation, and as a body, we've got nothing but time ahead of us. So it's time to start building again. But, if I've learned anything from that wall or from Solomon's great triumph, this will take time. We've got careful, deliberate work to do, up close, one stone at a time, some boulders, some hearting hidden inside.

But none of us do this work alone. We rebuild stone by stone, person by person, relationship by relationship. And our focus on caring for each other -- for the poor in our midst, for justice, for mercy, for kindness, for Christ -- all that slowly, slowly stacks into wonders we couldn't've imagined before. Y'all, we got this. Colgate's back. I'm back. Y'all are back. God hasn't gone anywhere, but God's met us back here. Now our little church may be building, but we're only one stone among thousands ourselves. Yet another piece in an ever-growing creation accomplishing the unfathomable. All those nasty things out in the world don't stand a chance. So I guess that's one thing I learned this summer. One stone at a time, no matter how big or how small, one at a time. Connected to the ancient, and creating new now, stone by stone, we'll grow.