

MAY 2020

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

The Tale of the Living Stones

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In the Bible we find people who had special encounters with God, and they wanted to erect monument to commemorate these moments. These stones would remind them how God rescued, protected, and delivered them from danger. These people made vows at these places where they had a special experience with God.

Today, I preach to you standing in front of the Armenian Genocide Memorial Monument of Fresno, which reminds us of the tragedy of our Genocide by the Turkish government and our amazing story of survival.

It is a miracle that I am standing here and talking to you. Each Armenian has a story to tell of how their grandparents survived the Genocide. So here I am in front of those stones that were erected in 2015 on the campus of California State University in Fresno on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Genocide. It is a place of pilgrimage for us, to come face to face with our history and a great reminder of God's mercy over us.

What are some biblical monuments that we can review?

• **BETHEL** (God's House)

¹⁸So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, ²²and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall



be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you. (Gen 28:18-22)

Let me start with **Jacob**. He had a dream, he woke up and said, **Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.** (Gen. 28:16) Jacob used his "pillow" stone as the foundation for a monument and set it as a pillar. Several years later he returned to that place and built an altar; he poured oil on the stone and named

the place Bethel, which means God's house. **He truly experienced God's presence in that place.** And anyone who passed from that land would see that stone monument and worship God.

• **GILGAL** (Circle of Stones) (Joshua and passing river of Jordan)

When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ²"Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, ³and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" ...¹⁹The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²²then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³For the LORD your God dried

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Badveli Nerses Message:

Living Stones

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up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, ²⁴so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever. (Joshua 4:1-3; 19-24 ESV)

God told Joshua to ask twelve men to bring along a stone, one for each tribe. When they passed the Jordan River, they laid them down in a circle and made a monument in a place called Gilgal.

Why?

So they could tell their children about God's amazing miracle. The Lord, Yahweh helped the Israelites to pass the river (like the Red Sea). So that **all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.** (Stones of God's rescue and deliverance).

What are those stones telling to them and to us? "God longs for us to proclaim His goodness to future generations."

• **EBENEZER** (The Stone of Help)

¹²**Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us."** ¹³**So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.** (1 Samuel 12:12-13 ESV)

It is another amazing story. Samuel brought a major change in the life of the Israelites. The leadership was corrupt and not listening to God. Samuel was a man of God. He even became their judge. He led the Israelites to win the war over the Philistines. And Samuel erected a stone, a monument called Ebenezer meaning Stone of Help (also it means till now the Lord has helped us). This monument tells us that

ALL GLORY goes to God.

How about in the NT with Jesus. Are there any "stones" that worth mentioning?

• **PETER, THE ROCK, THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH**

In the Gospel of John, when Simon was introduced to Jesus, Jesus gave him a new name: **You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas** (which means Peter, Rock). (John 1:42 ESV)

Then we read in Matthew where Jesus explains why Simon is called Peter:

And Jesus answered him, ¹⁷**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** (Matthew 16:17-18 ESV)

Indeed, the church became the living stone,

a stone which talks and witnesses even today and tomorrow. The church is built on one foundation, Jesus Christ who is our Cornerstone. **(The Stone of the foundation, the cornerstone).**

How about this Monument?

Today what are those stone telling us Armenians and all the people of the world?

These stones are telling us:

1. The genocide did not and will not stop us from worshiping God. This is our Bethel. This is a place where we remember our encounter with our Lord and our God, and we come to worship HIM. We will offer our lives as living sacrifices. Nothing will stop us from worshiping our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. This monument will remind us that our God is the one who delivered us. It is our Gilgal, the place where the "tribes" of Armenians brought with them their memory stones from Marash, Aintab, Mousadagh, Kharpert, Izmir, Van and Moush and so on...

What a good location for this monument in the center of a college campus where hundreds of students walk by every day. This is a testimony of our faith to them and to our children.

Our God is a God of amazing miracles. The Lord, Yahweh helped us pass "the river" and the desert to arrive to new lands even to have an independent Armenia. (Stones of God's rescue and deliverance).

3. Those stones are our Ebenezer, our stone of help. All glory goes to God.

We live post resurrection of Jesus. Jesus gave new meaning to the stones.

On Palm Sunday when some ordered him to silence the people from shouting Hosanna he said stones will cry out.

He looked to the temple and he knew those temple huge stones will collapse one day, and indeed it did happen 70 AD

Jesus gave a new meaning to the temple stones. He became the new temple. Then He invited each of us to become temple of God. We are now the LIVING STONES, telling the story of Jesus shaping our lives.

That is my identity. My Armenian and American identity is shaped daily on the Corner Stone who is Jesus himself.

Peter, the rock, says:

⁴**As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."** (1 Peter 2:4-6)

This monument should remind us this. Should remind us to be Christ centered people serving the Lord and sharing the Good News with anyone from any nation and culture.

This is my message of April 24. I celebrate life today. I remember the pain, but I move forward with talking about the risen Christ in our nation.

Those stones are our Bethel, our Gilgal, and our Ebenezer.

This message was given during the online worship service April 26, 2020.

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR KEVIN KASPER

I read a quote from the preacher Charles Spurgeon, which in essence said that decrement wasn't being able to tell truth from fiction, but being able to tell truth from what is almost true.

That's the problem, or maybe genius of a good lie – it's almost true.

During youth group we've talked many times about the lie that the serpent tells Eve. Maybe that begs the question, did the serpent lie? Because what the serpent told them happened, they came to know good and evil, they didn't die, at least not immediately.

So did the serpent lie, or did he leave out some details to make what he said "almost true" by withholding of information – deception by way of making things look one way, his way – when really they were another.

Almost true – when we leave out information to make things seem the way we want others to think they are, we are behaving like the evil one, and not like God.

But when we fall for a deception, we feel like a fool, we become a bit self-defensive, we become more guarded and for obvious reasons – nobody likes to be played for a sucker.

Thomas didn't want to succumb to that – so he lay out his skepticism to the other disciples – let me shove my fingers into the holes of his hands, and into his side, then I'll believe. In many ways Thomas should be a hero to us, whereas Luke generalizes the disciples reaction to the report of the resurrection, calling it an "idle tale" or as some translations have it, "nonsense". John goes and singles out Thomas and his rationalism – not going to believe it until I shove my fingers through the holes in his hands.

Whatever else we want to say about the disciples, they weren't gullible. They didn't want to fall for good lie. That's why Thomas should be a hero – he stands in for us, in some ways he verbalizes what we who live 2000 years later desire, he verbalizes for anyone who doesn't want to fall for something that's "almost true". And Jesus graciously condescends to his need, basically saying, "okay Thomas, let's play it out."

Thomas's reaction, "My Lord and My God."

2020 ANNUAL GIVING RECAP

For where your Treasure is,
there your heart will be also.

– Matthew 6:21

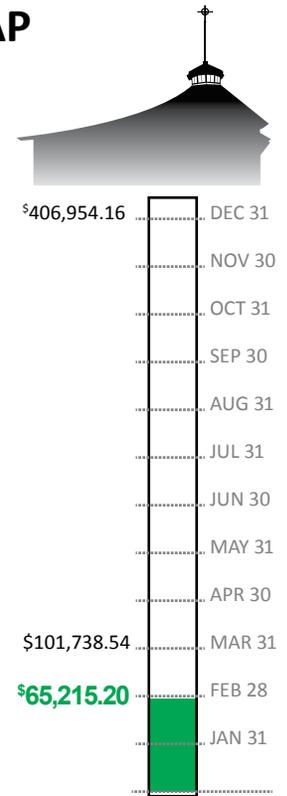
The graph indicates the budgeted amount for annual contributions. The current month indicates where we should be at this time, based on the budget. For March we should be at \$101,738.54 as recorded on the graph. The final amount shown is the actual contributions collected for the month. We have collected \$65,215.20 through March 31st. We have collected 64% of the amount needed to operate our church home during the first quarter. The good news is for March we collected 80% of the monthly total. As you may remember January and February were tough months bringing the collective total percentage down. Even better news is a glance at the month of April looks even better than March. He continues to bless our church as we continue to be faithful and obedient to Him. Thank you for your continued generosity in changing times!

I am inspired and filled with gratefulness every Sunday. Our service team has done more than step up during this season of distancing. They didn't miss a beat even with the first Sunday online by keeping us united as a church family. THANK YOU to Badveli Nerses and Badveli Kevin for the time, effort and creativity put into each service. You have continued every week to make the service relatable, personal and a moment in our crazy lives right now that is normal. Each service is enlightening and thought provoking and as always brings a smile, too. THANK YOU to all those who help in making our experience almost like we were sitting in the pews next to each other. Our Badvelis are blessed with a dedicated team. And how about the music we've heard? What amazing performances that bring us to our feet in our home church. I have encouraged friends to tune in to our services as well as forwarding a link to them for a sample of encouragement in these troubling times. While each week brings some smiles and entertainment there is no substitute for the Word of God spoken into our lives and in our homes. How blessed we are to have this connection maintained in these times we need it most. God Bless all of you that have participated and continue to carry on our Pilgrim home!

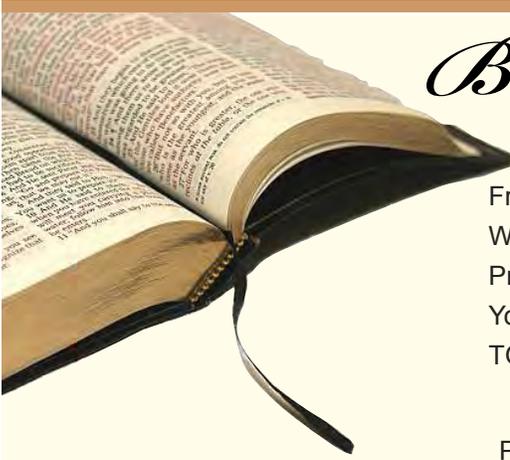
"fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10 ESV)

This verse reminds me of one of my favorite Badveli Kevin worship songs, *God's Highway* by Sandra McCracken (excerpt):

*But on we go, He knows the way
And in His arms, He keeps me safe
Fear not, keep on, watch and pray
Walk in the light of God's highway*



– by Treasurer Patrice Ruble



Bible Study Opportunities

- Fruit of the Spirit Fellowship Monday Night Bible Study 6:30 PM Zoom
- Women’s Morning Bible Study .. Tuesday 10:0 AM Phone Conference
- Prayer Time Bimonthly To be Announced Zoom
- Young Adult Bible Study Thursday Night BS 7:00 Zoom
- TGIF Men’s Group..... Friday Morning 7:00 AM Zoom

Join any group... or more!

Please contact the church office, Badveli Kevin, or Badveli Nerses for details.

MODERATOR’S REPORT

**God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble,
therefore we will not fear...**

(Psalm 46:1,2)

As we continue sheltering in place, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we praise God for His protection and provisions enabling us to continue our service to Him through the church’s ministries (young couples, youth/Sunday school, Dorcas Guild, men & women Bible studies), which are being conducted virtually.

We thank God for our pastoral staff: Reverends Nerses and Kevin, our Office Administrator, Houry and our Custodian, Joe, for keeping the operation of the church going.

The Council met April 28 via Zoom. Each board and committee presented their oral report. On behalf of the Congregation, the Council thanked our pastors for keeping the Pilgrim Church congregation connected via a virtual worship service each Sunday.

Action was taken to postpone the June Congregational Meeting to a date to be determined as soon as possible after the “shelter-in-place” has been lifted.

Finally, the Council wishes to inform the Congregation that an opportunity has been made possible to continue contribution to the ministries of the church, by establishing “On-line Giving” for your convenience. If God leads you to contribute, please refer to the Pilgrim Church.com website, where you will find a sub-menu called “**On-line Giving**”.

We praise God for the opportunity to serve Him through Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church,

**As it is, there are many parts,
but one body.**

– 1 Corinthians 12:20 NIV

– by Moderator Edward Saliba

YOUTH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

- Robert Petrosyan 5/2
- Julia Branche 5/6
- Ruben Ketendjian 5/6
- Elliot Jinkerson 5/8
- Sienna Gunn 5/10
- Joseph Petrosyan 5/11
- Daniel Olkova 5/19

Happy Belated Birthday to Amelia Israyelyan whose birthday was in April

**“May you be blessed by the Lord,
the Maker of Heaven and earth.”**

Psalm 115:15, NIV

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SUNDAY SCHOOL

Don’t Forget – Sunday School Lessons are available online at digitalpass.lifeway.com

Registration is free for this streaming service

Two programs are available:

- LifeWay Preschool at Home for Pre-schoolers/Kindergarteners
- LifeWay Kids at Home for 1st to 6th Graders

During the Month of May we will be learning about the Apostle Paul and his experiences teaching others about Jesus

YOU WON’T WANT TO MISS ONE WEEK OF LESSONS!

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MIGHTY MEMORIZER

You can call Teacher Cathy at 285-5780 to say your verses.

Mighty Memorizer is FUN – CHALLENGING – and A VERY REWARDING WAY to learn God’s Word.

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A little COVID-19 Humor and...



Human in 2019



Human in 2020



Mary, do you accept John as your lawfully wedded husband? If you do, press (Enter). If you don't press (Escape).

HOW TO ATTEND CHURCH ONLINE

- GET OUT OF BED AND GET DRESSED**
it will put you in the right mindset for worship
- GO THROUGH YOUR NORMAL SUNDAY ROUTINE**
minus the "hurry up, we're late" part
- GATHER TOGETHER AS A FAMILY**
no multitasking; worship is a family activity
- STREAM TO YOUR LARGEST SCREEN IF POSSIBLE**
it will feel like you are really "there"
- SING ALONG LOUD AND PROUD**
it may feel weird, but it also feels weird to the people leading worship in an empty room
- PREACH WITH THE PREACHER**
say amen, clap, shout and take notes; have a time of prayer at the end; make your home a sanctuary

BREAKING NEWS

Wearing a mask 🤒 inside your home is now highly recommended. Not so much to prevent Covid-19 but to stop eating.



On the night of his arrest, Jesus gathered at the table with his disciples in an upper Zoom...

...Pilgrim Prayer Time on Zoom



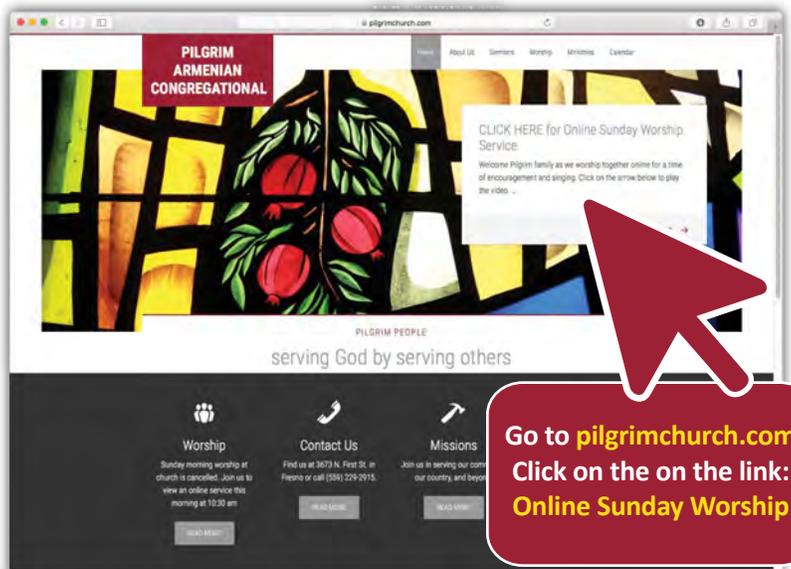
Sunday Morning Worship Heard Online!

As the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to evolve, we want to assure you, our valued members of the church, that we are monitoring the situation closely. We do so from a position of faith and trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and not from fear. Our greatest concern is for your health and safety, as well as our church staff and their families.

We want to let you know that we are here to support you. With that being said, and in accordance with the lock-down we will not be gathering for worship service on Sunday Morning. Instead you will have the capability of watching and listening to the Sunday worship service remotely from the comfort of your home by visiting the church's web page:

www.pilgrimchurch.com.

As always, we trust in God's plan and encourage you to trust in Him and not be afraid. Going forward, we will monitor and evaluate the COVID-19 situation regularly and update you with any further changes. We pray for health and peace during this challenging time.



Let us be faithful and vigilant in our prayer for those nations, communities, families and individuals most affected by this outbreak, and for the medical personnel and government officials seeking a solution. Above all, let us remember and rejoice that "nothing in life or n death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans: 8:38-39)