

Introduction: Good morning, and welcome to Chapel. My name is Kerry Kuehn; I serve as the physicist here at Wisconsin Lutheran College. I have been asked to make the following announcements before we begin...

Overview: This morning we will be using the order of General Devotion on page 20 in your service bulletin. After the invocation, we will sing the first two verses of Hymn 531.

Invocation: In the name of the father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Hymn 531: *Christ is made the sure foundation*, verses 1 & 2.

Lesson: Metaphor – as you know – is a type of comparison in which a notable similarity is found between two otherwise very different kinds of things. The use of metaphor is very common in literature and poetry. What you may –not– know is that metaphors are very common in science, too. Consider a few examples: light is said to be like a wave rippling across the surface of a pond. Tiny cells inside of animals are like machines or vehicles or pumps. The human mind is said to be like a super-computer which can process information. Regardless of how tenuous each of these metaphors may be, the purpose of each is to help us grasp some difficult or elusive thing by comparing it to something with which we are much more familiar.

In Scripture, the use of metaphor is also very common: *the LORD is my rock and my fortress* (Psalm 18); *man is like a breath* (Psalm 144), *God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12), and one of my favorites: *the sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron* (Deuteronomy 28). In First Peter, our text for today, we find an extended metaphor in which Christ and his church are compared to a house built of stones:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

One of the very notable things about the use of metaphor in Scripture is that it starts from our knowledge of earthly things—rock, water, air, fire—to illustrate or clarify a heavenly or spiritual truth. But here is the interesting twist which I'd like to emphasize: after a bit of reflection, it often becomes clear how little we really understand about the earthly thing, and how much more confidence we can place in the spiritual truth toward which these metaphors point.

Take, for example, our understanding of the Earth. When you studied Earth Science, or some such subject in grade school, you were probably presented with a rather detailed drawing of the inside of the Earth. On the outside is drawn a thin crust of solid rock, about 100 kilometers thick. Beneath the crust is the “mantle”, a region of hot, molten rock on which the crust floats. And at the center of the earth is an iron core a bit bigger than Earth's moon. The outer part of the core is molten iron; the inner part is solid iron. The center of the Earth is about 6000 km beneath our feet. But do you realize that, unlike the fabulous story of Professor Lidenbrock's and his young nephew Axel's “Journey to the center of the Earth” (Jules Verne, 1864), nobody has ever come anywhere close to the center of the Earth. In fact, the deepest hole that anyone has ever drilled was by the Soviet Union in the 1970's and 80's. The drill bit finally melted and they had to stop drilling. The hole was 12 km deep. It barely scratched the surface of the crust. The scientists ended up just capping the hole, probably after some project scientist accidentally fell down the hole while walking around playing some game on his cellphone. He actually had a chance to text all of his friends before he hit the bottom, 12 km below. These scientists literally just scratched the surface of the Earth. Most of the knowledge we have of what goes on inside the Earth is indirect knowledge, from studying how fast earthquake waves travel through the earth and then surmising what must be down there. These are guesses—educated guesses, to be sure—but guesses nonetheless.

Our knowledge of earthly things is often quite tenuous. But after studying Scripture, our knowledge of spiritual things rises to the level of confidence. In fact, it becomes more sure than our knowledge of earthly things. In short, God's Word has given us Faith. What is the object of our Faith? The

cornerstone—Christ—rejected by man: crucified. And chosen by God: raised from the dead for our justification. This Faith is precisely what makes us members of the Holy Christian Church.

What is the Holy Christian Church? It is *not*, as you know, a physical building, no matter how intentionally beautiful or humble. The Church is *not* the sum total of the people listed in your church's pictorial directory. The Church is *not* the physical descendants of Abraham. This error was maintained by the Pharisees, who Christ himself rebuked sharply for making this false claim. The Church is *not* identified as the people who swear allegiance to a particular earthly leader or bishop. This error was addressed by the Lutheran reformers during the 16th century. They recognized clearly what is spoken of in the passage from first Peter: that the Holy Christian Church is an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. And Christ alone is the chief cornerstone of this structure.

This is what we confess in the Apostle's creed: I believe in the "Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." An earlier formulation of the creed uses the word "catholic" instead of "Christian", which correctly emphasizes that this church is not tied to any outward government or nation, but that it is instead "universal." The Church is not merely an outward organization, it is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was given to each and every one of us by Faith in the Gospel, when we were baptized, and every time we receive the Lord's Supper, and every time we confess our sins and and our sins are forgiven. As Peter writes:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Please rise for prayer (special prayers?): Merciful God, Your Son, Jesus Christ, was lifted high up on the cross that He might bear the sins of the world and draw all people to Himself. Grand that we who glory in His death for our redemption may faithfully heed His call to bear the cross and follow Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

You may be seated as we sing the final two verses of hymn 531.

Hymn 531: *Christ is made the sure foundation*, verses 3 & 4.

Blessing: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen