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5/7/23, 1 Peter 2:2-10

"The Importance of Alignment"

In our reading today, the author of 1 Peter introduces something we might call the Principal of Alignment. It's the idea that when elements of a system are aligned in the same direction, it leads to good things like: strength, stability, and well-being.

Alignment leads to good things. Misalignment leads to problems. I brought in my car for routine maintenance last week. I learned my auto manufacturer recommends a wheel alignment every 6,000 miles. If the tires are out of alignment, it can cause vibration in the steering wheel. It can cause the tires to wear out prematurely. Gas mileage suffers.

It's true of our cars and it's true with our bodies as well. Has anyone experienced the pain and discomfort of body misalignment? I, for one, have terrible posture. I'm always trying to remind myself to stand up straight. If the bones making up our spine are misaligned, it can lead to things like decreased mobility, chronic headaches, and low back pain.

In life, misalignment tends to lead to bad things. We instinctively understand the value of alignment. We even have an idiom for it. When something positive happens, we might say the stars were aligned. When a situation goes well, we assume something had to have been aligned properly. Hopefully, the stars will align for the Celtics to win their playoff series.

I believe what's true for our cars and our bodies is also true in the spiritual life. Have you ever experienced a time when your spiritual life felt dull and uninspired? You felt no real connection to a higher power. You weren't sure if you believed anything anymore. When those thoughts come, it feels like something's off, like our spirit and God's Spirit aren't in alignment.

I really notice it when I can't sleep at night. It doesn't happen to me often, but every now and then, I'll lay awake in bed thinking of stuff, over and over. That's when I know something's not right with my spirit. Something's not lining up. There are so many signs: procrastination, worry, knowing there are things we want to do and know we should do, but we just can't seem to bring ourselves to do them. When nearly 100,000 people die of drug overdoses annually and there's a mass shooting nearly every day, it seems we have a spiritual crisis. Something isn't lining up.

According to the author of 1 Peter, God desires to bring each one of us into spiritual alignment. To get the point across, he employs the image of building a house. Instead of an actual house, it's a spiritual house, what he calls a "holy priesthood." This spiritual house is to be made up of the followers of Jesus. He refers to them as "living stones."

The key point about this spiritual house is that Jesus is the cornerstone. Architecturally, the cornerstone is the most important stone in the whole structure. It's the first one that gets placed and it determines the orientation of the entire house. All the other stones are placed in alignment to the cornerstone.

If we are in alignment with Jesus, that means our values will align with Christ's values. Our thoughts will align with Christ's thoughts. Our behaviors will align with Christ's behaviors. Our habits will align with Christ's habits. With that kind of alignment comes meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.

You don't have to be an architect to realize that if you want a wall to be sturdy and stable, the stones can't be turned every which way and placed at odd angles. Anyone who has ever played with blocks knows a misaligned tower will soon fall. Alignment brings sturdiness, strength, and stability.

The author of 1 Peter writes, "Come to him [Jesus], a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living

stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.” Did you catch what’s going on here?

God is building something. God is aligning people with the cause of Christ. The instruction is simply to let themselves be built into a spiritual house. The beauty of this is that God is doing the building. All they have to do is allow it. All they have to do is not resist God’s efforts.

I actually think worship is a way God keeps us spiritually aligned. It feels like being in a theatre with you all sitting in rows facing what is basically a stage. It sort of creates the expectation that you’ll be entertained when you come into the space.

But worship isn’t entertainment. It’s a repair shop. When the bumpy roads and potholes of life lead to spiritual misalignment, worship is the instrument by which God brings us back into alignment with Christ’s ways.

When you need your wheels aligned in your car, you don’t do that yourself. You take it to a garage. That requires knowledge and expensive equipment most of us don’t have. If your spine goes out of alignment, you don’t attempt to make the adjustment yourself. You go to a medical facility.

When you find yourself in spiritual misalignment, get to the sanctuary and see what God can do. Let the hearing of God’s word, joining voices in sacred music, praying together, and the connection with others, bring you back into alignment with Jesus, our cornerstone. Trust that God will use those things to help you. Worship is a spiritual repair shop.

Communion is another means of realignment. Why do the deacons spend time filling those little cups and cutting bread into little squares every month? Because Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Receiving the body and blood of Christ is a way to align ourselves with him.

Have you ever heard that quote of Hazrat Kahn? “I asked for strength and God gave me difficulties to make me strong. I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to learn to solve...I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome. I asked for love and God gave me people to help. I asked for favors and God gave me opportunities. I received nothing I wanted. I received everything I needed.” Maybe certain things we experience, maybe the presence of certain people in our lives is our alignment. Maybe God can use all of it.

We align ourselves with political parties. We align ourselves with news sources. We align ourselves with schools. We align ourselves with sports teams. But Jesus is the cornerstone. It’s God’s desire to bring us all into alignment, so the building can be stable and strong.

There’s one last thing to which I want to call your attention. I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed this, but at the front of the church there are cornerstones with words engraved in them. If you leave through the front doors, take a few steps to the left and you’ll see them.

Engraved in one of them is the year 1747, which is the year this meetinghouse was constructed. George Washington was 15 years old when this building was built. As historic as this building is, First Parish Church is not a building. A church is a group of people who order their lives around the life and teachings of Jesus. A church is a spiritual house made up of living stones.

Anyway, when this meetinghouse was built, the road out front didn’t exist and it faced west, toward the Parish House. In 1882, the church members decided something wasn’t lining up. They decided to lift the building, turn it to face the road and set it back 20 feet to its present location. Whenever I think decision making is difficult, here at the church, I think about the debates that must have taken place around that decision, the church meetings they must have had.

In life, alignment matters. If God led those who came before us to literally lift this building and realign it, we are in the right place. So, make yourself at home here. Settle in. And let yourself be built into a spiritual house.