

This was a more challenging sermon to write than the previous one that I did. Upon first reflection of the scripture for today, I was not excited. I looked at these texts and thought, “Wow, this is the filler episode in the lectionary. I know they can’t always be great texts, but they could at least include more exciting stories than these.” Now I was aware that that’s kind of a ridiculous thing to think about the lectionary, as it was made by much more theologically experienced people than me. But nevertheless, those were my first thoughts. I ran through a number of different ways to come up with some interesting reflection and commentary that would enhance the texts but I kept getting stuck on how to combine the texts with my ideas. I read over a dozen commentaries on the texts but I was a bit jaded by the first one I read, which outright said, “these texts have no common themes,” which the person who wrote wasn’t wrong about, but not entirely right either.

Now this continued for several weeks, until I stumbled on a short commentary talking about pieces fitting together in the right but unexpected ways. And that was my aha moment. I instantly knew exactly what I was going to talk about. Lego.

Now to explain a little more, among my interests such as Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, and philosophy, I really like Lego. I find it very relaxing and engaging to build the various sets, whether they be simple sets like a racecar and truck to an elaborate depiction of Van Gogh’s Starry Night. But of the various themes of sets that Lego produces, my favorite has to be the Botanicals theme, which features various plants like bonsai trees, flower bouquets, and other potted plants. What I especially like is a particular rule that the theme has, which is that they won’t make any new molds for the theme. This doesn’t sound like a big deal, as there are thousands of unique Lego elements, but it means that if the set designer wants a unique petal or leaf shape, they can’t just commission a new element like they’d be able to in the Star Wars,

Marvel, or Lego original themes to get the perfect detail. Instead, they have to flex their creativity muscles, and come up with novel uses for existing pieces. Notable examples of this include using the demogorgon head piece from Stranger Things as small blooms on a pearl orchid, various hats to make different petals, or bananas to make a chrysanthemum. The most famous example however is the cherry blossom bonsai tree, which uses 100 pink frogs for the blossoms. As an aside, if you would like to see some of the building techniques used, find me during fellowship, where I will have a vase of Lego flowers showcasing some of the weird pieces. But back to the discussion, when the designer for a set, called a master builder, picks the pieces that are going to be used, they cannot look at each component individually, but must look in their mind's eye at how the whole set is meant to look and how it will come together. Similarly, in the Bible, context is hugely important. So I will cheat a little and reference things that happen slightly outside the scripture readings, but all for the sake of emphasizing the importance of today's scriptures.

In youth Sunday School, we are actually covering the book of Romans at the moment so the youth and I have learned some interesting things about the letter in terms of its history as well as the themes discussed within. The letter to the Romans from Paul sits in a somewhat unique position amongst the other letters. The church in Rome is not facing a particular problem within itself like many of the churches Paul writes to, nor is he familiar with many of the members of the church in Rome, requiring the letter to be more formal and less personal than his other letters. However, the main themes of his letters stay in Romans, with the idea of salvation for all due to the redemptive works of Jesus. In the Romans passage for today, Paul calls us to give ourselves to God and use our gifts for the benefit of the church. But it is not always clear how our gift is meant to fit into the church mission. And sometimes it seems like the church may be in need of a

gift that we cannot provide. But discerning how our gifts are to be used is not so much up to us as it is to Jesus, much like the Lego piece does not choose how it is used, it is the judgement of the master builder of the set to employ the piece in the most beneficial way. Now we can help in the building process. Paul writes in verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Sometimes we do this by being the piece used in the logical way, like a headlight brick being used for headlights, but other times the way we can help is just by being the right shape or size to fit the niche that is required, like wolverine claws being just right for pine needles. But just as we ought to be a piece useful to the building of the congregation, we must be aware that we are not the only piece. Paul continues in verse 3, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Now, think of Jesus declaring that Peter is the rock that the whole of the church will be built on. We know a few things from this. One, Jesus is a funny guy. In both Aramaic and Greek, declaring Peter the rock of the church is a clever pun, as the two words are the same. In Greek, both Peter and rock are *Petros*, while in Aramaic, both Peter and rock are *Kepha*. Second, we know that Peter is far from perfect. While the most famous example of Peter being flawed is when he denies Jesus three times, not five verses after the gospel reading for today ends, Jesus rebukes Peter and says to him, “Get behind me, Satan!” and in the verses from last week, Jesus calls him “you of little faith.” Now to the average person, putting all your trust in a single being who you know to be flawed would be insane. This has happened with Lego on many occasions, regarding colors of bricks. Throughout Lego’s history, there have been colors that from certain

time periods are infamously brittle. Gold, brown, dark red, and pink have all suffered this weakness. But Jesus is not looking at the piece that Peter is in isolation. He is looking at the whole of the construction of the church and knows that while it may seem that Peter is a weird piece, like guitars as the petals of flowers, he is just right for the position as the rock on which the church is built. As humans, we, unlike Lego pieces, have a chance for redemption when we falter. Jesus knows that even though Peter will mess up from time to time, he will in the long run follow God. Finally, we know that Jesus is very pleased with and proud of Peter. By referring to him as “Peter, son of Jonah” in verse 17, he is commending Peter’s insight and faith in regards to who Jesus is. And just as Jesus is pleased with the foundation of the church, so too does he care about each of the members, loving us both when we are clever and when we fail.

Both of the scriptures for today are about discovery and understanding of the greater world. In Matthew, Peter and the rest of the disciples come to understand that Jesus is not just another prophet or reincarnation of a former prophet, but is the Son of the living God. In Romans the discovery is more personal. We must come to understand that our gifts were given by God with purpose so that we may show his love on Earth. Now understanding that, we’re going to get into some philosophy and a weird metaphor. One of the most famous concepts in Greek philosophy is the allegory of the cave, explained by Plato. The allegory of the cave is meant to explain how philosophers seek higher levels of understanding. Although not exact, we are similarly called to seek a greater understanding and appreciation of each other, the church as a whole, and God. So let's follow a Lego themed adaptation of the cave. When we get a big pile of Lego, typically we look to the instructions or the pictures on the box for what the pieces are supposed to build. We often are chained to the notion that the pieces are meant to be put together in one particular way. These are just the shadows reflecting on the wall of the cave from a place

out of our sight. But we can choose to unshackle ourselves from the instructions and expectations for the set. And that can be incredibly daunting, just as it would be to suddenly be blinded by the sunlight as we exit the cave lit by fire. I myself have a bin of Lego meant to be built into two particular sets but I am challenging myself to put those pieces together in a unique manner. But when you free yourself from the expectations of the box, it can be incredibly rewarding in the long run. It fosters creativity and a better appreciation for what others have built. For Lego, that's the master builders in charge of creating the sets. For us, that's Jesus applying our gifts in ways that we would never expect. I did a children's sermon a while back about how many different combinations there are of just six 2x4 Lego bricks. 915,103,765 unique combinations are possible, and that's just counting the "legal" combinations, though even Lego set designers would utilize more combinations not counted. And if we can come up with almost a billion different combinations with just six of the same brick, imagine the number of different combinations that Jesus, as our master builder, can create with the gifts of our congregation, or Christianity as a whole. Even going back to my early complaint about this episode of the lectionary. The master builders of the lectionary knew what they were doing when they split up the readings the way that they did, guided by the hands of Jesus. And sometimes we will fall apart, crumble, break, or just not fit together right. But both Jesus through Peter, and Paul through his letters, make it very clear that through the redemptive mercy of God, we are always welcomed into the embrace of the church. Jesus is the master builder of the church and we are the pieces, put together in clever and sometimes unexpected ways to bring out beauty and utility as agents of grace and love.