

Building the Church - Peter

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Sermon Audio file

My name is Troy. I'm from Hauraki, from Tainui Te Waka, from Tapuari ki te Maunga, from Ngāti Tara Tokanui and Ngāti Tawhaki. My family name is Renata, from Paul (Paora). Jess is my wife. I'm from Whangatira and have two tamariki, Zion and Elijah.

That's a bit of who I am and what makes up the person sharing with you today. I hail from the mighty Hauraki and was born at Waikato Hospital. My parents lived just down the road in Fairfield when I was born, so it's good to be home. This Renew Together season feels like a homecoming tour — a couple of weeks ago I was in Paeroa, where my whānau are from.

I'm here with my beautiful wife. We've been married almost 13 years. We have two amazing boys: Zion, who's 7, and Elijah, who's 5. Last night we were enjoying the mighty Auckland FC winning the A-League — now called the Auckland League.

Before doing this work, I served in youth ministry for over 11 years, most recently at Manukau City Baptist Church, which is still our home church. I want to affirm what was shared earlier: young people, your school may be the biggest mission field you will ever be on. Lead your generation to know our beautiful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who loves us so much that He gave everything for us. Seeds sown by a fellow student can be far more powerful than any Sunday message. Make your school your mission field.

Arotahi Build — Building the Church

We're in week three of Renew Together, focusing on building the church. For more than 140 years, New Zealand Baptists have been involved globally in planting and building churches through training pastors and evangelists and supporting church associations.

New Zealand Baptists have helped plant churches in Tripura, a northern state in India, for over 87 years. There are now over 1,000 Baptist churches with more than 100,000 baptised members — over 60% of all Christians in Tripura. Tripura Theological College, the only theological college in the state, equips people in theology, biblical depth, and pastoral training.

This week we explore what it means to build the church and our role in that. Let's turn to Matthew 16.

Matthew 16 — "On This Rock I Will Build My Church"

Jesus and His disciples arrive in Caesarea Philippi, a city full of pagan temples and imperial power. Jesus asks, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples reply with names reflecting messianic expectations: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. Then Jesus asks, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Peter answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus responds that this revelation came not from human insight but from the Father. Faith is not an intellectual achievement; God awakens it in us.

Jesus then says, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” Christians have debated whether the “rock” is Peter himself or his confession. What we know is this: Jesus is the builder. The initiative is His. Peter and the apostles are foundation material shaped by Him.

Jesus adds, “The gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Caesarea Philippi was known as the literal “gate of Hades” in pagan worship. Jesus declares that His church will be powerful and victorious over death.

He gives the disciples the keys of the kingdom — authority to bind and loose, partnering with Jesus in His prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.” The Great Commission fulfills this promise: the keys open doors for others to enter the kingdom.

Jesus then tells them not to share this yet, because the crowds would misunderstand “Messiah” as a political uprising. His kingdom is built through proclamation, not coercion.

John 21 — Restoration of Peter

Before Peter can be a “rock,” he must be restored. He denied Jesus three times; now Jesus asks him three times, “Do you love me?” This is not cruelty but restoration — rebuilding what was broken. Each affirmation comes with a commission: “Feed my lambs... take care of my sheep... feed my sheep.”

Peter is reinstated not to a position but to a calling defined by love for Jesus and care for His people. Jesus then foretells Peter’s martyrdom and repeats the same call as at the beginning: “Follow me.”

The church is built not by ambitious people seeking influence but by those who love Jesus enough to go where He leads, feed who He loves, and trust Him even when the building looks like the cross.

Pentecost — The Spirit Builds the Church

It is fitting that this message falls on Pentecost Sunday. Jesus told His disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit before beginning their mission. In Acts 1, He says they will receive power when the Spirit comes and will be His witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts 2, the Spirit arrives with wind and tongues of fire. The believers are filled with the Spirit and begin speaking in other tongues. After Pentecost, the followers of Jesus become bold, courageous, counter-cultural witnesses whose lives testify to God’s power.

The church Jesus promised is formed through the empowering and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

Living Stones — 1 Peter 2

Peter writes to scattered, suffering believers, describing the church without giving himself special status. Though Jesus once called him the rock, Peter points entirely to Jesus: the living stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God.

Believers are “living stones” being built into a spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone. The language once used for Israel — chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation — is now applied to this new community of Jesus-followers.

The church exists to “declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

Peter reminds them that rejection and hardship do not mean God has abandoned them. They are in good company: the cornerstone Himself was rejected.

Ephesians 2 and 1 Corinthians 3 affirm that believers are God's temple, His dwelling place through the Spirit. We are living stones shaped and woven together by God's Spirit.

Conclusion

God's church is His people — living stones woven together by His Spirit. He builds on the foundation of the apostolic witness: the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

He builds through imperfect, restored people like Peter — and like us. He builds through a diverse, scattered community declaring His praises. He builds through His Spirit dwelling in us. He builds through His mission, which He invites us to join.

The question is whether we are following where He leads, loving who He loves, proclaiming what He has done, and trusting the One who conquered the cross.

We are invited to consider: - Do we need to hear again that our failures do not define us — that we are loved, redeemed, and forgiven? - Are we leaning into the Spirit's leading, partnering with Jesus in what He is building? - Are we willing to follow Him in our daily lives — in our whānau, workplaces, friendships, schools, and universities?

Following Jesus is still the word. And it is still enough.