

“You Are God’s People”
1 Peter 2:1-10
5.10.20
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
5th Sunday of Easter
9th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 Peter 2:1-10 CEB

1 Therefore, get rid of all ill will and all deceit, pretense, envy, and slander.² Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, ³ since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God’s perspective it is chosen, valuable. ⁵ You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ Thus it is written in scripture, Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed. ⁷ So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. ⁸ This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God’s own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. ¹⁰ Once you weren’t a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you hadn’t received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Three weeks ago, we began our journey in 1 Peter. The Gentile Christians from Pontus, Cappadocia, Bythnia, Galatia, and Asia who live under the thumb of the Roman Empire. They have given up the privileges that Rome can offer them and have embraced Jesus Christ. These Christians have also turned away from their families and friends. Each of the converts felt quite at home as proud Roman citizens and now, they are “strangers living in the world of the diaspora”.

The author of 1 Peter encourages the Christians throughout the Empire by reminding them of God’s holiness. Because they are God’s beloved children who reflect a loving and holy God, they are to behave like it. They may feel like wanderers in the desert, as their spiritual ancestors, the Jews, did with Moses generations before them. These Christians may feel isolated, but Peter says: You will be holy, because God is holy. The journey through the wilderness and being holy do not complete themselves overnight. They are a process.

Last week, we were in the latter part of 1 Peter 2. It is the first of what is commonly called the household code, also found in other epistles. For Peter, he addresses the slaves first. He holds them up as the first example of suffering servants that all Christians, regardless of status, will mirror. Of course, these suffering servants reflect the ultimate Suffering Servant: Jesus Christ.

As Peter reminds the audience that Christ suffered even though he was innocent, all Christians, regardless if they are free or slave, will endure suffering in this life. The Suffering Servant who

was born to poor parents, who ministered to the weak, who was executed by the state, who defeated death through his death and resurrection is the example to all the audiences in the 1st and 21st centuries. Because of Christ's work and the Spirit's moving, our deeds will not go unnoticed to the world. Eventually, those who didn't believe in the LORD will glorify him.

Today, Peter is reminding the 1st century audience in 2:1-10 of their continued responsibility living as strangers in a world that once was their own before they recognized Christ as their Savior. At one point, these early Gentile Christians chased after the Roman virtues. They were consumed by them. The foundation they laid for their spiritual lives was rubbish at best. What the Roman Emperor could offer these people paled in comparison to the glorious life found only in Jesus Christ. Before these Christians became Christians, they bought into the lie of Rome as the answer and the Emperor as their savior. A haphazardly built foundation that would eventually crumble.

And 1 Peter 2:1-3 begins with a series of virtues. Nothing extraordinary by our standards and a list that seems to repeat itself in other New Testament passages.

Therefore, get rid of all ill will and all deceit, pretense, envy, and slander.

These early Christians certainly faced those harmful vices from many of their family members and former friends. And Peter encourages them to remain steadfast in the faith. Just because people are slandering them, don't respond with such nonsense because it's harmful and it won't help build a better foundation for their lives. Instead, Peter continues, that these Christians are to feed themselves on the "pure milk" of the Word and be nourished by it. Meditate on the Word and reflect the holy example set before us by Jesus Christ, the true source of our faith's foundation, not the Emperor, and not Rome.

Jesus Christ, the one who humiliated death through his death and resurrection is, according to Peter, the Living Stone. The stone that had been rejected by the state and some religious authorities is the actual cornerstone of our foundation. Our lives that make up a holy temple are built upon the only foundation that cannot be shaken.

I imagine it must have been hard for these early Christians to find their footing in a world that was once theirs as long as they did what Rome commanded. Now, they may feel isolated and unsure of who they are and whose they are. But, Peter is brilliant in this letter! For the first 33 verses, Peter unpacks what they are going through as "strangers living in the world of the diaspora" and that they are to be "holy because God is holy" in spite of the chaos around them. Then, in the 34th verse of this letter, Peter tells these uncertain and possibly frightened people a comforting word:

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people who are God's own possession.*

For people who have given up so much regarding relationships, possessions, and social status, who have been told from the very beginning of this letter that they are strangers, are now being told that they are in God's possession. They are a holy nation, a chosen race, a people who are held in God's hands. Once, they were living in ignorance. Now, they are living in God's "amazing light"!

What these Christians gained by being God's own chosen people outweighs all that they lost. The security that Rome and its Emperor could offer is nothing compared to the ultimate security found in the Living Stone. The Living Stone who is our Savior, our security not only in this life, but in the life to come, is our hope.

I find it ironic as we navigate the pandemic and are doing worship online, this passage talks about a cornerstone. Of course, we first think of buildings. And then we think of those grand churches with a cornerstone that has an inscription sounding something like this:

*The Presbyterian Church of *XYZ**
Dedicated to the Glory of God
Insert Date Here

And yet, most of us aren't meeting in church buildings for the time being. For many of us, it's unsettling, but it's what we have to do. This crisis has forced us to rethink what church looks like. Today's passage helps us to think what, or rather, who the Church is. The Church is not confined to a slab of concrete, no matter how glorious the building is. The Church's foundation is not created of human made materials, but of the God who became human, the Living Stone, who lives in us. And we make up the Church.

No matter how near and dear our church buildings are, they will crumble because they are created by humans. Yet we, who are the Church built on the Living Stone will not crumble. We are God's own possession. We are in God's hands. We are God's people.

In Peter's time, the Church was changing. In our time, the Church is changing. But, what remains the same is our Savior, the Living Stone, the Ebenezer (which means "Stone of Help"), the Sure Foundation, Head, and Cornerstone of our lives who is right there with us. And because of the Holy Spirit's transforming power, we will continue because our God is not finished with us.

Friends, be encouraged and believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.