WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

I Peter 2:2-10

May 17, 2020

This passage from I Peter is so full of good stuff. It’s memorable; one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible.

From this passage we learn from the Lord about the Church. First off, the individual Christian is likened to a living stone, and the Church is a living edifice into which you and I are built. Clearly, that means that *Christianity is community.* In this unusual time of danger and death and pandemic we hear, too often for some, the notion that ‘we’re all in this together.’ Suzanne said one time recently that if she heard that phrase one more time, she’d scream. But it literally is what Peter is telling us Christians.

By our nature, we are all in this together. The individual Christian only finds their true place when we are built into the edifice of the Church. CEB Cranfield, a New Testament scholar of some note, writes that “the free-lance Christian, who would be a Christian, but is too superior to belong to the visible church upon earth, is simply a contradiction in terms.”

There is a famous story from Sparta. A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and he could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, “Where are these walls about which you speak and boast so much?” The Spartan king pointed at his magnificent array of troops. “These, he said, “are the walls of Sparta, and every man of them a brick.”

Now the point is quite clear. So long as a brick lies by itself it is useless. It only becomes of use when it is built into a building. That is why it was made; and it is in being built into a building that it realizes its function and the reason for its existence. So, too, with the individual Christian. To realize our destiny, we cannot remain alone. You and I have to be built into the fabric and edifice of Christ’s Church. Lone Christians, like lone rangers, do not form up Christianity. Christianity is community within the fellowship of the Church. We are all in this together.

And what we’re together at is a Priesthood, a *holy priesthood*, in Peter’s words. The priest is the one who him or herself has access to God, and whose task it is to bring others to God also. In the ancient world this access to God was the privilege of the few, the professional priests, and in particular of the High Priest. He alone could enter into the Holy of Holies and into the very presence of God.

But through Jesus Christ, the new and living way, that access to God is the privilege of every Christian, however trained or untrained he or she may be.

Further, the Latin word for priest is *Pontifex,* which means bridge builder. *Pontifex* comes from the same root word as pontoon as in a pontoon bridge. So: *Pontifex/* Bridge Builder. The priest is the person who builds the bridge for others to come to God, and for God again to have access to God’s beloved people. The Christian has the duty and the privilege of bringing others to that Saviour whom they themselves have found and love.

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

‘Offer spiritual sacrifices.’ The priest is the one who brings an offering to God. Now we’re all priests one to each other, right? So each of us brings our spiritual offering, and makes a way for you to bring yours, too. Under the old dispensation, the offerings which were brought were animal sacrifices; but the sacrifices of the Christian are *spiritual sacrifices*. The Christian makes their WORK an offering to God. The simplicity and beauty of Shaker furniture and crafts? They are purposely made beautiful because the Shakers consciously viewed their task and their abilities and their work as their gift to God. It had to be beautiful and good, it was the very best they could do, always. It was their gift to God, right? If everything we do is a gift to God, and I mean everything, from your chosen profession, to your volunteer activities, to washing the pots and pans after dinner, if everything we do is given to God, then it is all clothed with glory.

You could even call it *your worship*, couldn’t you? Your praise and love given to God. Our love and praise to our God . . . that is what worship is, isn’t it? And even this Sunday worship we’re attending to . . . Christians together make their worship and their offering of themselves to God. And when that happens, the worship of God’s House becomes not a burden and a weariness, but a joy and a privilege. It is not something to be pushed through, but something in which *the best is being brought to God.* That’s pretty neat, right? Pretty engaging. As in, I want that to happen to *me.*

Matter of fact, you and I ourselves *are* an offering to God. Romans 12:1 said, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice to God.” What God desires most of all is the love of our hearts and the service of our lives. And that is the Christian sacrifice, if you will, that each of us make, and which each of us helps the other to make, too.

So, as Peter says in v. 9,

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

And in v. 10 we learn of the things to which we witness, the things God has done for our soul.

Once you were not a people,

but now you are God’s people;

once you had not received mercy,

but now you have received mercy.

The Christian is called out of darkness into light. When a person comes to know Jesus, they come to know God. No longer do they need to guess and grope around. No longer do they need to think of God as the distant, the remote, and the unknowable. “The one who has seen me,” says Jesus, “has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). In Jesus is the light of the knowledge of the very God. When persons come to know Jesus Christ, they come to know *goodness*.

In Christ you and I have a standard by which all actions and motives may be tested. We know what real goodness is; the perfect pattern and the perfect ideal are disclosed to you and me . . . in Jesus.

When we come to know Jesus Christ, we come to know the *way*. Life is no longer a trackless road without a star to guide. Life is no longer a bewildering maze in which we don’t know where to go and what to do. In Christ the way becomes clear and plain.

When you and I come to know Jesus Christ, we come to know *power.* It would be little use to God to know God without the power to serve God. It would be little use to know goodness, and yet be helpless to attain it. It wouldn’t be very much use to see the right way, and to be unable to take it. In Jesus Christ, though, there is the vision and the power.

Peter goes on to say that once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. The ruling characteristic of non-Christian religion is the fear of God. However, the Christian is the one who has discovered the love of God through Jesus Christ, and who knows that he or she need no longer fear God, because it is well with their soul.

And that’s where we get our power, right? God has made the people who were not a people into the people of God. OK. So what? Well, this means that the Christian is called out of insignificance into significance. A person’s greatness lies not in themselves, but in what has been given them to do. Our greatness is in that task. The Christian’s greatness is that God has chosen you and God has chosen me to be his man or his woman, and to do God’s work in the world. No Christian can be ordinary because every Christian is a man or a woman of God.

Peter has called us living stones, built on the strength of the cornerstone which is Jesus Christ, built together for the task of loving Jesus in this world. In v. 9 Peter uses a whole series of phrases which are a summary of the functions of the Church. He calls Christians “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people dedicated to God—a holy nation, yes?—God’s own people.” Wow. What a thing. What a thing to live up to and live into.

Christians are a *chosen people*. Remember in Exodus, God made a covenant with the people Israel. He approached them with the spontaneous offer that they should be especially His people, and that He would be uniquely their God.

So we learn this about our chosenness. (a) A person of Christ is chosen for *privilege*. In Jesus Christ there is offered to Christians a new and intimate relation of fellowship with God. God has become our friend, and you and I have become God’s friend. What a privilege!

Second, Christians are chosen for *obedience*. The privilege brings with it responsibility. God chooses the Christian in order that you and I might become the obedient child of God. We are not chosen to do as we like; we are chosen to do as God likes. Our privilege is not to obey our own desires, but to obey the desire of our God.

Thirdly, Christians are chosen for *service*. It is our honor that you and I are the servants of God. Our privilege is that we will be used for the purposes of God. But it seems we can only be so used when we bring to God the obedience with God desires.

So we’re all in this together, chosen for privilege, chosen for obedience, and chosen for service. And in these—privilege, obedience, and service—God chooses you and me to be God’s royal priesthood, God’s holy nation. Holy. The word means different from, set apart. You and I have been chosen that we may be different from others around us. And that difference is that you and I are dedicated to God’s will and to God’s service.

See, Christians are a people for God especially to posses. Note this: very often the value of a thing lies in the fact that someone has possessed it. In any museum there are quite ordinary things—clothes, books, pieces of furniture—which are only of value because they were once possessed and used by some great person. It is the ownership which gives them worth.

And it is so with the Christian. You and I may be a very ordinary person, but we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, because you and I belong to God. Amen.