

“MORE THAN A BUILDING”

1 Peter 2: 1-12

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Ann Hamel

Isn't this a beautiful place to come together to worship God? It does not seem long ago that we were in the midst of visioning, planning and finally in construction of this sanctuary which was completed almost 4 and a half years ago. Remember the pictures. Remember what it looked like when the old was demolished and the new began, the foundation laid, then the outside structure, then the inner areas of structure and systems and finally the painting, flooring and furnishings. What a day it was when we then dedicated this place to the glory of God. I can remember the music and the procession from the fellowship hall to this sanctuary. And yet, this building is not who we are. When we come together here, we are so much more. Have you ever thought of yourself as a living stone, likened to another living stone, the cornerstone upon which a magnificent spiritual house is being built? Have you thought of yourself as part of a Holy Nation, a Royal priesthood, a Chosen race?

In Peter's first letter from which our scripture is taken today, Peter, who is an apostle of Jesus Christ, a man who walked with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, an ordinary person, who made mistakes, who even denied knowing Jesus the night before he died, but who was forgiven and redeemed by this very same Jesus, is now writing to various groups of Christians in various territories of northern Asia, now modern Turkey. The year is approximately 64 A.D. just prior to Nero's intense persecution of Christians. For Nero had accused Christians of burning Rome. These Christians were facing persecution for their faith and Peter is writing to encourage and support them.

In the passages read this morning, Peter uses metaphors and imagery from the Old Testament, related to the nation of Israel and presumably to the structure and functions of the old Jewish temple, located in Jerusalem, to describe to these Christians who they are in their relationship with Jesus Christ and their purpose. He then calls them to what I would call a holy standard of living as individuals and as the church within their community and the society/environment in which they live. Why? so that unbelievers might see their honorable deeds and glorify God.

Let's take a closer look at these three elements- Relationship, purpose, holy living.

First: Let's look at how Peter identifies who these Christians are in their relationship to Christ. In the scripture passage Peter says "Come to him, a living stone, rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight and then later identifies this living stone as the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the first stone laid in a building which makes the foundation stable and starts a new work. If you ever want to try to build a new structure from an unstable corner piece try using marshmallows and spaghetti sticks. This was a challenge presented to us for a group building exercise at the church retreat in October.

Needless to say, our group had some difficulty building any height to our structure. It just did not want to stand on its own. We had to reinforce and re-reinforce especially this one marshmallow at the bottom on the corner to keep the structure from falling over. (A Picture of that structure is on the screen. As you can see, It looks quite unstable.)

This group building exercise reminded me, as I was thinking about today's scripture of how strong a foundation we have in Jesus Christ for the living stone the cornerstone to which Peter is speaking is Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus is the living stone, the cornerstone that gives life to those who believe in him, and as these believers are identified with Christ and come to him initially and in an ongoing relationship, they are like living stones being built by God into a spiritual house, His church. Peter identifies them as a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood.

In the Old Testament, the people did not come directly into God presence but a priest would act as intermediary. It was only the high priest that could enter the holy of holies where the Ark of the Covenant representing the very presence of God was housed. The high priest could enter the holy of holies only once a year. (In the picture on the screen you can see a diagram of the Jerusalem temple. At the top you can see the veil that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the building.) With Christ's death this veil was torn and with His resurrection and victory over the cross, this practice changed. And believers can now come directly into God's presence without fear at any time. This priesthood of believers is royal because believers are now a part of God's family with Christ who is king of kings. They are royalty because they are now His brothers and sisters. They are a holy nation for they are distinct from all others because of their devotion to God. They are a chosen race for they are a distinct group from the rest of the world united by the Holy Spirit. They are God's people and they are not left alone. God lives among them in the spiritual house he is building.

Secondly in these verses, Peter identifies to these Christians their purpose. First to offer spiritual sacrifices. And what might these spiritual sacrifices be? Although not specified in the verses read today, what they are comprised of can be found in other new testament letters such as indicated from Roman 12:1 offering self and one's will to God's control, Ephesians 5:2 offering love to

God and others, Philippians 4:18 offering money and possessions freely to help spread the gospel, Hebrews 13:15 centering one's life around continual praise to God, and Hebrews 13:16 doing good and sharing freely with others (Life application commentary).

And secondly they are to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light.

As Christians they are to spread the good news of God's love, of Christ's life/teachings, death and resurrection for salvation; and they are to share how their relationship with Christ has influenced and changed their lives.

Their purpose is then twofold: to offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the mighty acts of God

Peter then calls them to a holy standard of living as the people of God, a part of the new spiritual house being built by God, the church, the family of God within their community, within the society/environment in which they live.

And again why? So that unbelievers might see their honorable deeds and glorify God.

These believers because they now have a new life in Christ are to rid themselves of malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander and they are to long for pure spiritual milk, the living word of God that they might grow into salvation, maturity in Christ. They are urged to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war with the soul and to conduct themselves honorably among the Gentiles even though these gentiles accuse them wrongly

Let's reflect and recall all these things Peter wrote and then can we say "wow" Peter, thank you for your letter for this letter also is for us, here, now, today in this 21st century. All this imagery and content Peter has given to us inspired by our loving God tells us of how much value we are as God's chosen people. We are royalty. A people being built into a spiritual house, God's family where we have a relationship in which we can come directly to him at any time. We are the church in which his presence dwells. We have a purpose. What an incredible honor.

And what is our response to all of this.

Can we put aside things that may distract us from coming to Jesus? Do we long for His presence, spending time with him, desiring to know Him better? Do we read scripture, the written word? All, that we might be shaped and molded by him.

And as we are the church, do our hearts willingly offer to Him spiritual sacrifices? Do we proclaim his mighty acts? Do our lives reflect a standard of living that honors a Holy God?

And now we might say to Peter. Peter we're human. This is a high and holy calling and you know what, I'm not perfect.

Yes we can get all messed up sometimes, but, as you can see, stones are not the softest of building materials and not evenly shaped and are not the same. When living stones, the people of God come together there may be differences, disagreements, conflict for all may be at a different place, in circumstances, in commitment, in relationship, in maturity in Christ and we all fall short of all that Christ would have us be, but our cornerstone, Jesus, is solid and in His presence, his grace, his forgiveness, we are being shaped and molded as part of His spiritual house, the church.

The church of Christ is greater than decisions on issues that may be right or wrong,

The church is greater than we can know for the church is Christ's vision. It is the spiritual house that God is building, made of all believers now, those who have gone before and those yet to come. Through the church, through all of us, Christ is building His kingdom.

Let us pray

Resources

New Revised Standard Version Bible

New International version Bible

Life application Bible commentary

NIV Application Commentary