

Sermon from May 10, 2020

I know it's not often that I have preached from the Epistles, especially from 1 Peter. In fact, this may be the first time I've preached a sermon on 1st Peter. This passage from 1 Peter chapter 2 speaks about a people who are accepted, who are part of something greater than themselves. They are a stone that's part of a living temple, with the cornerstone being Jesus. We are accepted and named and claimed by God. We are not on our own, left to face all the problems of the world by ourselves. God welcomes us into God's family, not because we earned it or deserve it. God welcomes us into God's family because of God's abundant and ever-flowing grace. This morning, I want to touch base on what this passage means for us today. Specifically, we are beloved by God and accepted into something bigger and greater than ourselves, the Church of Jesus Christ. We are never alone nor abandoned. So, let us journey through this passage, shall we?

We are beloved by God and accepted into something bigger and greater than ourselves, the Church of Jesus Christ. We are never alone nor abandoned. In today's short passage from 1 Peter, we read multiple times that we are part of something greater than ourselves. We read in verses 4 and 5:

“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. 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.”

And later, in verses 9 and 10, we read,

“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. 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.”

God calls us and welcomes us into a royal priesthood. We are a stone in the construction of the Church of Jesus Christ. We are part of a tradition that spans generations. We are stone in the Holy Temple, whose foundation is built upon Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. Just how a temple is not made from only one brick, we are part of a tradition and family of believers that supports each other. We cannot be God's Holy Temple without each other. We are part of something larger than ourselves.

I love this idea of how we are part of something larger than ourselves in our faith. Far too often, especially in our society, we've created this mentality that faith is all about what I experience. We hear people talk about their faith as if it's an island. My Jesus. My God. My faith. If the congregation does something I don't like, I'm taking my money and going somewhere else. For many people, church has become something we experience, like a night out or going to a movie. But in 1 Peter's passage that I read from this morning, Church is not about just me. Church is about Christ. Church is about us relying upon each other and supporting each other. As Revs. Eric Fistler and Rob McCoy wrote on their website, Pulpit Fiction, "None of our churches emerge out of nothing, but come out of a deep tradition. That tradition may cause us to repent (for the ways the Church has supported, enacted, or remained silent in the face of slavery, oppression and anti-semitism) and may cause us to rejoice (movements of liberation, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and welcoming the stranger). We cannot ignore our tradition." We cannot ignore our tradition. We are part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own. We are part of something larger and greater than ourselves.

During this time of crisis, the Church of Jesus Christ has a responsibility to everyone, not just some people. That is why Session continues to keep our congregation closed. We have a responsibility to care for all of God's holy people, not just ourselves, so we stay home when we really want to meet up together. We make phone calls and send texts and emails to people to check in on them. We give out of our abundance for the food pantry to help feed people, especially in this economic crisis we are facing. We pray for people in our community and around the world. We continue to stand up for justice and righteousness when we hear about the kind of injustice and racism that shoots unarmed black men out for a run.

I know that things are difficult now. Things were difficult before the stay-at-home order and the Corona Virus, but now they are heightened to levels many of us personally haven't experienced before. But the good news in the midst of all of this is that we are not alone. We have each other, bricks holding up each other. We have Christ supporting us as the cornerstone of our faith and our lives. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. We can trust and know that no matter what happens, we are all in this together. So rest easy today, dearly beloved, and know that we are here for each other. Amen and amen.