

Sermon for May 18, 2014 – Easter 5

1 Peter 2:4-10 (AAT)

Theme: “**You Are a Unique Part of God’s House**”

- 1) *Living stones, connected in Christ*
- 2) *Holy Priests, proclaiming God’s salvation.*

⁴ *Come to Him. He is the living Stone Whom men rejected but God selected as precious.* ⁵ *You also are being built as living stones into a spiritual temple, to be holy priests who bring spiritual sacrifices that God gladly accepts through Jesus Christ.* ⁶ *The Bible says: “I am laying in Zion a Cornerstone, chosen and precious, and if you believe in Him, you’ll never be disappointed.”* ⁷ *He is precious to you who believe, but to those who do not believe “He is the Stone which, rejected by the builders, has become the Cornerstone,* ⁸ *the Stone they stumble over and the Rock they fall over.” When they disobey the Word, they stumble over it; that’s the end appointed for them.* ⁹ *But you are a chosen people, priests of the King, a holy nation, a people saved to be His own and to tell of the wonderful deeds of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had received no mercy, but now you have received mercy. (AAT)*

Turn on the T.V. and you will soon sense that the world does not agree with our Christian values and faith. It mocks our ideas of marital fidelity. It calls us fools for believing in a young earth created by God. It accuses us of being intolerant for not accepting all religions as equally good, and it charges us with being hateful for calling things like abortion and homosexuality a sin. Like stones on a farmer’s field, the godless world has no use for us, considering Christians a nuisance and hindrance to real progress.

But even if the world considers you worthless, take heart. Why? Because the Lord values you highly because of your faith in His Son. With St. Peter as our guide, let us learn that **you are a unique part of God’s house.** 1) *You are living stones, connected in Christ.* 2) *You are holy priests, proclaiming God’s salvation to this sinful world*

Part One: *You are living stones, connected in Christ.*

The society that surrounded the Christians to whom Peter originally wrote this letter had a lot of similarities with ours. Greed, violence, and sexual immorality were the hallmark of that culture – just as they seem to be the hallmark of ours.

On top of this, the Christians in Peter’s day were constantly mocked, laughed at, and even physically harmed because of their faith. All of these things made them feel helpless, hopeless, and even a little bit worthless.

Like lights in the darkness, Christians stand out in this godless world and, because of this, we face all sorts of ridicule. And this wears on us! So what should we do: hide our faith and start acting like the world? No! Rather, let us find our pride and joy in that which God has declared us to be in Christ!

“*Come to Him.*” our sermon text says. Keep coming to Christ Jesus every time you feel the temptation to give up or give in. And why? Because: *He is the living Stone Whom men rejected but God selected as precious.*

Strange, isn’t it? Stones are often not described as “living”. And yet Jesus is the living stone. How so? Because He is the first human to win eternal life, and he grants this life to all who believe in him.

All of us were once like regular lifeless stones. The Bible says: *You, too, were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you once followed the ways of this present world and the ruler whose power is in the air, the spirit who is now working in the people who disobey. Among them all of us once lived in our fleshly lusts, doing what our flesh and mind wanted to do, and by nature we, like the others, were people with whom God was angry.* (Ephesians 2:1-3, AAT) We were just as much lost in sin as the rest of the world. We had no hope or even desire to be saved. We were as spiritually lifeless as stones.

But God, Who is rich in mercy, loved us with such a great love. He made us who were dead in sins alive with Christ. (Ephesians 2:4, AAT). How? By sending His Son into the world to take on human flesh and blood in order that He might live for us the perfect life we have all failed to live. Christ came to suffer and die for all our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to show that sin has been paid for in full. He is alive – spiritually, physically and eternally – and so is everyone who believes in him, as our sermon text says: *I am laying in Zion a Cornerstone, chosen and precious, and if you believe in Him, you'll never be disappointed.*” ⁷ *He is precious to you who believe.*

Magnets are powerful things. If put iron scraps on a table, they just sit there. They have no power to move or go anywhere. But if I put a powerful magnet nearby, those same scraps seem to spring to life. The power of the magnet pulls them close and has such an effect on them that they become magnetized themselves – attracting other pieces of metal and connecting together with them. Separated from the magnet they have no power, but connected to the magnet they are full of energy.

In the same way, we – in and of ourselves - were spiritually powerless to do anything. But when Christ – the living stone – called out to us through the Gospel, something happened: we were awakened to spiritual life! The power of the Gospel drew us to Jesus, connected us to Him and to other fellow Christians through him. We are no longer lifeless, purposeless fieldstones. Christ's forgiving love flows to and through us as we cling to him in faith. As Christ is alive so are we. And just as a magnet attracts other metal objects through the metal objects it has already empowered, so also the LORD uses us to attract others to himself. And just as a master builder fits fieldstones together to build a wonderful house, *you also are being built as living stones into a spiritual temple* with Christ Jesus being the empowering cornerstone on which we are built and which also holds us all together.

What a comfort this is to know: even though we might feel all alone on this earth – worthless to the world – we are special to God. The Gospel has fitted Christians together in Christ to be the Lord's Holy Temple – the place in which God himself dwells – and this is what we are!

The world does not recognize this because it refuses to recognize Christ, as our sermon text says: *to those who do not believe “He is the Stone which, rejected by the builders, has become the Cornerstone, ⁸ the Stone they stumble over and the Rock they fall over.” When they disobey the Word, they stumble over it; that's the end appointed for them.*

All those who refuse to believe God's Word will stumble over Christ. They won't understand him. They will reject him – to their own damnation. And this is the fate of our world that mocks and scoffs at us for our faith in Christ. This is their end, unless they repent and believe.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do not envy the unbelieving world as it laughs at Christians and seems to prosper in the process. Understand the end that faces the people of this wicked world if they continue in their unbelief: as they reject Christ, so God will reject them. But you, rejoice in the relationship you have with God according to His grace and mercy. You are a unique part of God's house – you are living stones, connected in Christ Jesus. You are his holy priests, chosen to proclaim his salvation to the world, as St. Peter writes . . .

Part Two: Holy Priests, proclaiming God's salvation.

But you are a chosen people, priests of the King, a holy nation, a people saved to be His own and to tell of the wonderful deeds of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had received no mercy, but now you have received mercy.

To the world we are fools, but to God we are his dearly loved people – all according to his gracious love that saved us. And we are not just citizens of heaven (even though such a blessing would be more than we deserve). The Lord has made us members of his royal court. We are God's ambassadors to the world – proclaiming through both our words and actions the love God has for the entire world: His desire for all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Each of us is unique – having different talents and personalities. Together we form God's priesthood – a priesthood that intercedes on behalf of our world that all might repent and be saved. We are *holy priests who bring spiritual sacrifices that God gladly accepts through Jesus Christ*. And what are our spiritual sacrifices? They are living a life of love towards God and our fellow man in response to God's saving love towards us. In, Romans chapter 12, St Paul offers us some specific examples of how we can live like God's royal priest in the world. He writes:

I appeal to you, fellow Christians, by the mercies of God, to give your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, and so worship Him as thinking beings. ² Don't live like this world, but let yourselves be transformed by a renewing of your minds so you can test and be sure what God wants, what is good and pleasing and perfect. . . We have gifts that are different according to what His grace gave us. If you can speak God's Word, do it according to the faith. ⁷ If you can serve, then serve. If you can teach, teach. ⁸ If you can encourage, encourage. If you share, be generous. If you manage anything, do it eagerly. If you help people in need, do it cheerfully. ⁹ Love sincerely. Hate evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another tenderly as fellow Christians. . . Let your spirit glow. Serve the Lord. ¹² Be happy in your hope, patient in trouble, and keep busy praying. ¹³ Share what you have with the holy people who need it. Eagerly welcome strangers as guests. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Don't be too ambitious, but go along with the humble ways of others. Don't think you are wise. ¹⁷ Don't pay back evil for evil. Be concerned with things that everyone considers noble. ¹⁸ As much as you can, live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Don't take revenge, dear friends, but let God punish, because the Bible says: "I alone have the right to avenge. I will pay back," says the Lord. ²⁰ But, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. . . . ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil with good. (Romans 12 – select verses from the AAT)

Brothers and sisters in Christ: **“You Are a Unique Part of God's House”** *You are Living stones, connected in Christ. You are holy priests, tasked with the blessed duty of proclaiming God's salvation through your words and actions.* So let your Gospel light shine in this dark and evil world. When you feel the pressure of the world bearing down on you, remember the relationship you have with Christ and the wonderful hope of heaven we have through faith in him. Find joy also in the fact that you are not alone, but are connected to every believer from every nation on earth and in heaven. And finally, remember your purpose as God's chosen, royal priest: *to let your light shine before people that they may see the good you do and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16, AAT)*

Don't envy the people of this world, but pity them and pray for their conversion; because God's Word says: *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.* (1 John 2:17 NIV84). Amen.