

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2020
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

1 Peter 2:4-10 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (NIV2011)

“Rock Solid in Holy Priesthood”

I. Your Blessed Identity

Today I’d like to speak with all the saints today. Ok, how about all the priests? Still looking around, not seeing any qualifying candidates? I know, even my kids don’t recognize me when I’m wearing a clerical collar. But don’t look around or stare at your shoes. I’m talking to you. How about if I just restate it this way: God’s people. All of those names apply to each one of us. At least that’s the case if we take God’s identification for you seriously: **“you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.”** (1 Peter 2:9) That’s you, me, all God’s people. And the way God sees us gives us a special way to see ourselves, see our lives, see the world around us.

There are a lot of things that could dominate our sense of identity. Whenever you introduce yourself to someone, what is the first way you let them know who you are? You can see this on game shows when contestants are introduced. Alex Trebek introduces Steve as an accountant from Cincinnati with four children. The label underneath the contestant for the next Survivor challenge simply says “21 year old student.” You might prefer a more traditional approach where who you are is determined by your mother’s clan, then born for your father’s clan, your maternal grandfather’s clan and then your paternal grandfather’s first clan. No matter how you introduce yourself, maybe who you are is really dominated by the way you evaluate everything that’s going on and your priorities in life and what you focus your desires on.

Here's the issue with all those approaches. None of them really capture your most important place in life. Your family history is important. Your accomplishments are something you can be proud of. Your career is something that dominates so much of your life. And yet, aren't you more than that? Isn't there more to who you are than what could fit in a single sentence uttered by a game show host? God sure thinks so. Today we have one of the sections of Scripture that are foundational for how you see yourself and your life and what you do in life. In fact, these verses were part of a key insight of the Reformation. Not that Reformation Christians were the first to discover it. But that Luther and those who followed after him set it up as foundational for how we carry out our Christian lives. Peter says it this way: **"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."** (1 Peter 2:9) You are holy. You have the dignity of serving God in a special priestly capacity. You have dignity because of what God has made you. You have prestige because of the calling he has given you. God gives you a unique take on the world around you and your place in it. It starts with seeing yourself the way God sees you.

II. Struggles rob hope and cause us to forget identity

Sometimes seeing yourself the way God sees you can be a challenge. Your identity as a living stone comes from the Living Stone Jesus Christ. Peter begins: **"you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him."** (1 Peter 2:4) Some people never really give much thought to Jesus. Others have made a careful study of what he actually says, perform a thorough evaluation of what he says, and then reject him because Jesus doesn't pass their test. Having a Savior born in a barn become the substitute to rescue humanity by dying sounds too ridiculous. When God delivered his message through prophets, he always got mixed results. When God points souls to the Scriptures it sounds silly to so many modern ears today. Especially when that message clashes with what we want to hear. When belief in Jesus demands control over every aspect of our lives, disobedience to something so rigid leads to unbelief. When Jesus claims **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,"** he just sounds too exclusive to our open minded society today (John 14:6)

One of my favorite structures in the world is the Getty Center in Los Angeles. I admire the architecture as much as the artwork contained inside those buildings. Sitting on a ridge with a view of the mountains to the east, the ocean to the west and the city to the south, it is comprised of thousands of square tiles 30" by 30" of white travertine marble. It is impressive when taken all together. But you can start to wonder how important one single block would be.

Sometimes I don't feel very important. My part in God's kingdom seems insignificant. Right now it sure feels like this thing has dragged on too long. Do you feel that way too? You can't go to your favorite restaurant for Mother's Day brunch. You can't travel to Texas to watch your niece graduate. You can't invite your family over to celebrate important milestones. You can't get everyone together at your favorite park for a cookout. You don't know what is going to happen with your church. What is happening or what can't happen takes its toll on you.

But what has really changed? Are you not the same person? Is your God any different? Things feel different in your relationship. But Peter wants you to focus on the rock-solid basis for your relationship with God. Peter says it this way: **“Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’”** (1 Peter 2:7,8) God’s chosen means for establishing who you are might not be your choice. His plan to bring Jesus into the world might sound controversial to so many. But your identity rests on rock-solid footing.

There is a saying that you find out what people are really like in times of crisis. That’s when their true character comes out. In those tense times of testing we find out who we really are. That may be partially true. But sometimes the opposite is true. Sometimes we criticize the people trying to help us. Sometimes we judge people who are trying to give us encouragement. In those times we hear excuses. I’m not acting like myself. That happens to God’s people too. We forget who we are. We allow our circumstances to change us. We lose hope in the middle of our struggles.

III. Christ defines who you are

It is during those times of trial and crisis, stress and tension that we need to go back to our roots to find out who we really are. Your true identity isn’t based on how you feel or what you look like. It’s not built up on what you have done for the people in your life, but on what God has done for you. Your identity takes shape in who Christ is. Jesus Christ is the living Stone, chosen by God and precious to him. Jesus was chosen to walk through life faithfully following God’s plan every step of the way. Jesus was precious because he absorbed in himself all the wrath deserved from the righteous Judge for every weakness and doubt, every act of stumbling and rejection from every sinner in history.

You are someone because you are connected to someone bigger. Through Jesus Christ you have been made a part of something completely unique. Martin Luther explains it this way: “God wants us to despair completely of ourselves, to boast only of his goods and to build on the foundation which no creature can upset. No one should rely on his own piety, but one should trust only in Christ’s righteousness and in everything Christ has.... This is the foundation on which I stand.” (LW, vol 30, p. 59) You are part of God’s chosen race. God chose to save the world and then he chose you personally to be his child. You are part of the royal priesthood. You may recall that Old Testament believers couldn’t come directly to God, couldn’t come straight to the temple with offerings or sacrifices. They had to go through a priest. But you have access. You have privileges. You are part of a holy nation, perfect and sinless through the blood of Jesus. You are God’s special possession, bringing you into a special relationship with him as his dear child, cared for and loved by your Father.

You are a living stone only because your Savior is living. Christ makes you precious and honored because of your connection to him. Jesus is your cornerstone. What you are going through right now doesn’t change that. What anyone thinks about Jesus doesn’t negate his work of securing salvation for all humanity. What you feel or the doubt you experience doesn’t wipe out what Jesus is at work doing in your life. Right now, you can be proud of your place in his plans.

IV. Your life proclaims Christ's hope

I've noticed a bit of a "why bother" attitude lately. Teachers comment that students are less motivated to do their schoolwork. Parents are tired of forcing them to do it. People in general are relaxing the sense of urgency surrounding the pandemic. We notice some people getting weary of taking preventive precautions. And maybe we've gotten through the worst or maybe we won't see millions of death, but we still have a global pandemic on our hands.

People who have recovered from COVID-19 don't have to be prompted in interviews. If you have been spared from serious health dangers, you don't have to have someone nudge you to say thanks. Even if health care workers are doing their jobs, we want to express our gratitude. Even if it's what they do, what duties they were hired and trained to perform, we simply can't help recognize their heroism.

This is God's ministry for you. You have a ministry. You are equipped with special access and special privileges and powers. You are granted the opportunity to approach God and offer him your prayers and gifts. You don't need special training or privileged upbringing to serve in an exalted way. You are a minister given the precious opportunity to declare God's praises. And declaring God's praises doesn't require reading lots of text books or taking a bunch of classes. You simply tell what God has done. You praise and thank God for what he has done in your life and gladly let other people know it.

Your circumstances in life can take their toll. And yet nothing in this life changes what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. He is still your cornerstone. Jesus brushes aside the excuses and rationalizations of a world that rejects him. Jesus won't stand for any moral compromises. And the rock solid work of Jesus allows you to stand solid and safe forever. In times of doubt and confusion, go back to what God has done for you: **"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."** (1 Peter 2:10) Living for Christ, living with his power, living by his message for you, comforts your life more and more to Christ. Without him, you would be nothing more than a dead stone, isolated and worthless. But God is using us to build something special.

This is what it means to be a living stone built into the Living Stone, Jesus Christ. Hostility to Christ doesn't deter you from your mission in life. God has put you here at this time. God has brought you into his special structure. God uses you to bring others to him. Your priesthood status simply enables you to share the amazing things God has done and is doing. No matter what, you can be rock solid in holy priesthood. Amen.

+ May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will. Amen. +