

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – December 11, 2015

First Letter of Saint Peter

2 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴ 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."^a*

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,"^b*

⁸ and,

*"A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."^c*

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.

Rid Yourselves of Evil

- 1) Continuing with the thought begun by quoting Isaiah at the end of chapter 1, namely, "*All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever,*" Peter continues to build out what this means for us.
- 2) Isaiah contrasts the fleeting existence of man with the enduring word of the Lord. Peter connects this with the Gospel, the word that gives eternal life to all who accept it. (Peter 1:25 and James 1:18)
- 3) Because we have purified ourselves by obeying the Gospel truth (1 Peter 1:22), we are to rid ourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. We are to be holy, as our heavenly Father is holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

Outline of 1st Peter

1. **Opening Remarks** (1:1-2)
2. **Dignity of the Christian Life**
 - a. New birth in Christ (1:3-9)
 - b. Testimony of the Prophets (1:10-12)
 - c. Be Holy Yourselves (1:13-2:3)
 - d. Christ the Living Stone (2:4-10)
3. **Duties of the Christian Life**
 - a. Civil duties of the Saints (2:11-17)
 - b. Suffering like Christ (2:18-25)
 - c. Household duties of the Saints (3:1-7)
 - d. Moral duties of the Saints (3:8-12)
4. **Difficulties of Christian Persecution**
 - a. Conduct during Persecution (3:13-22)
 - b. Living for the Last Days (4:1-11)
 - c. Suffering and Christian Glory (4:12-19)
 - d. Shepherds and the Flock (5:1-5)
 - e. Humility and Vigilance (5:6-11)
5. **Closing Benediction**

^a Isaiah 28:16

^b Psalm 118:22

^c Isaiah 8:14

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- 4) The things that Peter lists here are all conditions of the human heart that inhibit the life of the Holy Spirit within us: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander, etc.
- 5) These conditions of the human heart impede, constrain, stymie and suppress the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. They represent to the life of the Spirit in me what morbid obesity represents to the life of the body.
 - a) As morbid obesity robs the body of health, energy and vitality, and as it introduces many hidden deadly conditions of illness such as type II diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and other hidden deadly ailments, so too, these conditions of the human heart in me point to a sickly and sluggish soul, greatly restrained in the soul's ability to spontaneously dance with the Holy Spirit.
- 6) Such a soul is unresponsive and indifferent to the life of the Holy Spirit within it. Hence these things are hidden killers – deadly to the soul.
- 7) By contrast, the soul that is compelled by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14) is unmistakable. When we hear and see that coming from the life of a man or a woman we know that the Spirit of God is completely unhindered in that person's life.
- 8) When the Spirit of God detects something in me that is wrong, He doesn't ask me to make it right; I cannot. He only asks that I accept the light of truth and confess it, and then the Holy Spirit will make it right.
 - a) A child of the light will confess sin instantly and stand completely open before God; whereas a child of the darkness will say, "Oh, I can explain that...."
 - b) When the light of the Holy Spirit shines on an area of darkness in us and brings conviction of sin, be a child of light – confess it immediately and God Himself will deal with it, as John wrote: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*
 - i) Take note: it is God Himself who forgives and purifies, not us. Our only work is to confess!

Like Newborn Babies, Crave Pure Spiritual Milk

- 1) Peter applies the imagery of new birth to new converts and those who are yet under-developed in the Christian faith.
- 2) We need the milk of sound instruction to grow and mature in the faith (Hebrews 5:12).
- 3) The simple elements of faith are to be sought at the breasts of "mother church" (Galatians 4:26) – that is, from the words of the Old and New Testaments which are our teachers, and from holy ministers of the Gospel who are our mentors in living out the Gospel message in our daily conduct.
- 4) So too, the holy sacraments, which are only found at the breasts of "mother church" build us up and sustain us in our new life in Christ.
- 5) Paul also uses this imagery, explaining to the members of the church in Corinth that he had fed them with milk, not solid food, because they were not ready for it. (1 Corinthians 3:2)

Christ, the Living Stone

- 1) In architecture, the cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.
 - a) The rite of laying a cornerstone is an important cultural component of eastern architecture and metaphorically in sacred architecture generally. There are a dozen references to cornerstones in the Old and New Testaments.

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- 2) In quoting Isaiah and the Psalms, Peter shows us the significance of Jesus Christ as God's cornerstone.
 - a) First, as the cornerstone determines the position of the entire structure, so Jesus Christ determines the position of His sacred body, the Church, described as a spiritual temple – in relation to God the Father. Jesus alone places us in right relationship to the Father and orients the entire structure of His church throughout the ages to be in correct aspect (to use an architectural term) with God's holiness, righteousness, etc.
 - b) Second, as all other stones are fitted together in reference to this Stone, we who are in Christ are fitted together to become a mystical part of His body, the church. Likewise, if our lives are outside of Christ, then we are not oriented with the other stones as part of the structure; hence to live outside of Christ is to be independent of His body, that is to say, it is to be apart from His spiritual temple and out of relation to God the Father.
- 3) Referring back to the three Old Testament quotes that make reference to this Stone, which Peter explains as an image of the Messiah, we see:
 - a) In Isaiah 28:16 the foundation stone of a new edifice is laid down by the Lord as an invitation to faith.
 - b) Psalm 118:22 points to the stone that was rejected by the builders (those who ought to have been building God's church in Israel according to the call and promise of the Patriarchs and Prophets) is chosen by God to be the cornerstone of a new building.
 - c) In Isaiah 8:14 the Lord describes Himself as both a sanctuary to the faithful of Israel and a stumbling stone to the unfaithful.
 - d) Similar use of these verses are made by our Lord Jesus (Luke 20:17-18), Paul (Romans 9:33) and Peter (Acts 4:10-11).

Christ, the Living Stone

- 1) Christ is described as "the Living Stone." The life of the church is organic, it is biological; not the construction materials of wood and stone that build architectural edifices that we call a church building, but a living fabric of believers woven and knit together into a living, breathing, mystical body of Christ on earth called the "church."
- 2) The mortar that holds together the individual precious living stones of the faithful (you and me) is the Holy Spirit, present in each of us.

You and I are likewise Living Stones

- 1) You and I are the only hands of Christ's on earth today, His only feet planted on soil:
 - a) ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Matthew 25:34-36)
- 2) The Church is pictured as a spiritual temple under construction. Believers are living stones built up securely on Christ, who is the cornerstone of the entire structure. (Ephesians 2:19-22)
- 3) Since temples are not only dwelling places for God but also houses of worship and sacrifice, Peter also describes Christians as a priestly people who make acceptable offerings to God through Christ.
- 4) These truths are supported by the three Old Testament quotes that Peter uses here.

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You are a Chosen People, a Royal Priesthood

- 1) Peter contrasts believers in Christ with those who reject Jesus, the Messiah. The words that Peter uses in verse 9 are a patchwork of expressions drawn from the Old Testament.
 - a) Two come from Isaiah 43:20-21, where Israel is the *chosen race* commissioned by Yahweh to declare His *wonderful deeds* to the nations.
 - b) Another comes from Malachi 3:17, where the faithful of Israel are called *God's own special people*.
 - c) Two more come from Exodus 19:6, where Israel is gathered at Sinai and consecrated as a *royal priesthood* and a *holy nation*.
- 2) These titles and privileges, once the exclusive prerogative of Israel, are now extended to the whole Messianic people – both Jewish and Gentile, who have come to share in the blessings of covenant relationship with God. (Romans 11:17-24 & 15:27)
- 3) One responsibility entailed in this relationship is the missionary vocation to announce God's goodness and salvation to the world. Hence we at St. David's Episcopal Church are a "*Church on a mission to Know God in Jesus Christ and make Him known to others.*"
- 4) "The priesthood of all believers" is embodied in the sacrament of Baptism whereby every member of the church is a sharer in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.
 - a) The office of "priesthood of all believers" is different in form and function from the offices of bishop and ordained minister. In this lay priesthood every Christian is equipped by the Holy Spirit to minister to one another, meet the spiritual needs of others (1 Peter 4:10) and to offer sacrifices of love and praise to God in our daily lives. (1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1 & Hebrews 13:15-16)

Once You Were Not...

- 1) Here Peter alludes to Hosea 2:23. In that Old Testament passage, Hosea is speaking about the restoration of Israel, specifically the northern tribes, who had rejected the Lord's covenant and had thereby reduced themselves to the status of the heathen nations.
 - a) Their return to "covenant standing" Peter says, is thus equivalent to the conversion of the Gentiles that is now taking place through the preaching of the Gospel and the ingathering of all the nations into the church. (Romans 9:25)
- 2) All believers, by faith in Jesus Christ, are incorporated into His church – His body – and brought thereby into right relationship (i.e. correct and proper aspect) with God the Father.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Sin is to the soul what morbid obesity is to the body. What is the metabolic rate of my spiritual life right now? Is it lean and fit, or has it become overweight, sluggish and sickly?
- 2) We need to feed at the breasts of mother church to obtain the nourishment necessary to grow and develop spiritually. What is my present level of spiritual nourishment? Have I been engaged in a spiritual hunger strike, embracing a spiritual anorexia by starving myself of solid teaching, or am I satiated and brimming full as a result of drinking living water?
- 3) Peter references a handful of conditions of the human heart that inhibit the life of the Holy Spirit in me. Of these three, which am I most prone to suffer from: envy, slander, or insincerity?