

OUR LIVING HOPE- MID WEEK BIBLE STUDY WITH PASTOR HETRICK

**"LET YOURSELVES BE BUILT"
1 PETER 1:25-2:10**

You may recall it in last weeks session we dealt with some pretty

difficult words to hear about the existence of slavery and perseverance. Today, we are essentially working backwards from that passage to the words that preceded what we discussed last week. Today we're going to hear what is essentially a pep talk from the writer of first Peter as he encourages those who listen in advance of the hard words he will later speak. As a side note, I'm not entirely sure why the folks who have constructed how the lessons in the lectionary appear made the decision they did in terms of order. That said, today we hear several images of a community centered in God's covenant with the people made known most recently in the work of Christ. I'm going to begin today by hearing the passage from 1st Peter. I have added the last verse of the 1st chapter and the first verse of this chapter for context:

" The word of the Lord endures forever. That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation- if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, the rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a corner stone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "the stone at the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

The writer of 1st Peter is encouraging listeners to take on a new life. A life that will at times be at odds with the popular culture and ideas around them. It will indeed be at times challenging and difficult to sustain the act of living faithfully amidst the risks and challenges and over the long haul. Today, the challenges we face may be different but I think we all know that the joy of an Easter Sunday is hard to sustain in the weeks to follow. All the more so I wonder how do we feel in this Easter season where we did not experience the joy of the packed room and the lilies and the hymns and our Easter best?

Perhaps, this year more than ever we need that pep talk of sorts that we received today we need to hear taste and see that the Lord is good. To believe that the Lord is still providing. We need to hear that we still are God's people, the living stones that God builds up in the world. Amidst all the places where people spend their energy tearing down instead of lifting up, how do we reflect the light and hope of Christ as a witness for ourselves and in the world?

Rid yourselves: "Rid yourselves," we hear. Some of you in these weeks we have been home have been going through closets and purging things that you suddenly discover you no longer need. The author in 1st Peter is encouraging us that since we have heard the good news of Christ, this news compels us to rid ourselves of those things which we will no longer be walking with as followers of Christ. This is where we hear the laundry list of ways of being that are inconsistent with being the community of Christ. Words of evil, deceit, hypocrisy, NV and slander are things that when they exist destroy community, rather than building it up. "Slander" here is intended to be heard as "repeatedly disparaging" someone.

In a community whose core value is the love of Christ made known in the cross, these behaviors should have no home. The writer talks about taking these things off which is a visual way of allowing us to think about taking off something that we wear in the world like a coat or a sweater.

In essence, we are asked to change clothes. So much of how we are seen in the world is based upon appearances. Making the conscious decision to look and act differently is a way of demonstrating a new way of being, a new sense of identity. The question becomes for what period of time will we be able to do this? We are not a people who find sustained commitment to come easily.

We see this every time we make decisions about what we will do and what we prioritize in our lives. It is easy to fall into the pattern of deciding that we will make time for things like prayer and worship and community when they fit the rest of our schedule. Lately, however we have been given a new opportunity in this time. I saw a meme that said, "Now I know that it wasn't that I didn't have time to clean, I just don't want to." There might be some truth there.

But in this time, as we feel some degree of loss or emptiness, the question becomes:

What are you hungry for? That gets asked a lot in our house some days. The writer of 1st Peter tells us that we should be like infants yearning for milk. We all perhaps are familiar either by experience or by story with the idea that infants when they're hungry begin searching for milk. Perhaps you've seen if you've held an infant who's hungry that infants begin to look at you to see whether or not you are the source.

Infants do not know much in the world, but know instinctively they are hungry and needs to be sustained. Likewise we in our lives hunger too and we need to be fed by that which will sustain us. There's an interesting play on words that's happening in the passage we are infants are yearning for spiritual milk. The writer is not saying that with more milk we will become more mature, but describing the single-mindedness of hunger that infants demonstrate, and that we should hunger in the same way for God's word-spiritual food.

The word for "spiritual" and the word for "word" are closely related in the Greek. "Spiritual" in the Greek is the word "logikos" and "word" is "logos." The word that was proclaimed is the word that feeds and we who were born a new are given this living and enduring word to help us to be sustained in faith. This word we are told endures forever. In other words we do not have to be afraid that there will be a time where we cannot or will not be sustained by God. The shelves will never be bare.

I thought about that as perhaps we have had moments where the thing we most want to eat is not in the house. Or we just graze to fill something. One person made a song about this quarantine time describing standing in front of the refrigerator door, and wonder "am I hungry or just bored?" It could just as easily have been "am I hungry or am I afraid?" "Am I hungry or sad?" "Am I hungry or angry?" Whatever we are experiencing, God wants to offer us something better. God wants to meet our true hunger.

Most of us can think of times when we have known the feeling of "taste and see that the Lord is good." This is the passage being referenced when 1st Peter says- you have tasted the Lord's kindness.

In this time of being physically apart as God's community, what do you most miss?

What do you most want to taste again?

How do you hear the idea that God's word is the only thing that truly feeds us?

1st Peter tells us that fed by God's word, made known in Christ, everything else follows for the community.

God's word reminds us of love, and so we are a community of love.

No matter what we love it all starts with the word of God. Spiritual food.

Spiritual house, spiritual sacrifices

Next, we hear imagery about being built into a spiritual house. Those who are fed by spiritual milk, are built into a spiritual house and offer spiritual sacrifices. It reminds me of "Gather Feed Send," a way we identify ourselves here at Grace. It may be easy to assume that being fed is in the meal we call communion. But here in 1st Peter, we hear that it is the word that feeds us. We, living stones, are being fed by the word, formed by the word and sent by the word.

The literal translation is "so to him you are coming." We come for spiritual milk, and then we are built up. We the living stones, those who have heard the word, and are fed by the word are coming. Just as God provided in the work of Christ, and in the giving of the word, and in providing for God's people, God is now building us. We, as living stones are patterned by the living and enduring word- Christ. As the cornerstone, Christ is the foundation and the example. Perhaps we can hear being grounded this way. You are chosen and priceless as Christ is.

But also, we are built in the pattern of Christ- remember that in 1st Peter this is the example of Christ's sacrificial living. Let yourselves be built up.

There are several passages of Old Testament scripture quoted here.

Exodus 19:5-6; Exodus 23:22. Passages that remind us of the people who were in bondage and were liberated by God and told to obey God's voice, keep God's covenant and speak as a holy people. Who were told to listen to God's voice and do as God directs.

Isaiah 43:20-21 Spoken to people who have been sent into exile as a consequence of ignoring the prophets and aligning themselves with those who would not save them. They now hear of water in the wilderness, and that God will act for God's people.

Malachi 3:17 Words of the last prophet in the Hebrew Scripture as God proclaims you are mine, you are special and you will be formed to praise God.

These passages all speak to God rebuilding the people.

Yet, as in other times, if Christ's example is yours, you will experience rejection, challenge, or even abandonment because you are at odds with the pull of popular sentiment. Remember, we hear, that if you experience these things, it is not because God has inflicted them, but because you are experiencing the world Christ knew. When someone reacts like you made them stub their toe, or fall, and they lash out, remember in such times, who God is for you.

A holy priesthood. We are to be servants of God as priests of old were. No longer is there a class of priests who do things FOR the people before God. We all share in this spiritual calling. You are chosen. Chosen to proclaim the word and the virtues of the one who called you- Christ. And we are to embody mutual love and faithfulness in a community centered in Him and in the world.

Here we have another Hebrew Scripture reference, this time from Hosea 1:6, 9 and 2:23.

Side track on the prophet Hosea-

The prophet Hosea was thought to have prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel, the northern kingdom. The central theme of Hosea is the relationship of God and Israel which had deteriorated as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness. Hosea calls Israel to come back to God and warns Judah, the southern kingdom, not to follow in the pattern of Israel. Hosea connects

God's covenant closely with loyalty and faithfulness, opposing those leaders who encourage people to sacrifice and give in ways that benefit the leaders but not the people. He opposed the unjust distribution of wealth and oppression of the lower classes. He is critical of the kings even seeing the state of leadership as an example of people's lack of trust in God. The main expression of his prophecy is through the metaphor of marriage. He marries a promiscuous woman and has children whose names in Hebrew mean "God sows," "no mercy" and finally, "not my people." This last naming is a reversal of the covenant, "I will be their God and they will be my people." In the end, God promises to restore the people who are called to faithfulness- to discern the ways of God which are clearly right, but which are not always obvious." ⁱ

In 1st Peter we see this reminder of God's choosing:

Out of darkness	into light
You were not a people	you are God's people
No mercy	God's mercy

**God created you as a community where one did not exist-
Or in a way it did not exist.**

What new ways of being community are grounding you in God's word in this time?

How might Hosea speak a word today?

Once you were not a people, now you are God's people:

On a typical Sunday before now, at times the things we focused upon may have differed. People at odds who cannot share the peace with each other. Is the youth texting in church is really listening? Will my fussy baby be welcome? In lots of little ways we lived out "not my people" some times. While God is patiently making us a house. But now when we are not in our building or able to speak of how many we worship, what now?

Barbara Lundblad tells the story of a place that had been in the news again recently, the potter's field on Hart Island in NYC, where those with no one to claim them are buried. A few years ago, a seminary student at Union Seminary worked with the homeless in a project called Picture the Homeless. She decided to hold a worship service for the homeless folk she knew to remember those they knew who had died and been buried, with no name, and no ceremony. That day, of those folks led the service. A woman named Dawn led the opening, and Robert read the story of Lazarus. Others told their stories of living on the streets. And at the close, each person was invited to write the name of a homeless person on a Purple Post it note.

All those notes were then placed upon a large sheet that hung between candle stands. It was obvious that there were far more names than the planners imagined. As some notes started to fall down but Dawn kept picking up the fallen names and putting them back on the sheet. Until finally, when it was completed, those purple Post It Notes were not being randomly placed. They spelled out WE ARE HERE.

Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people.

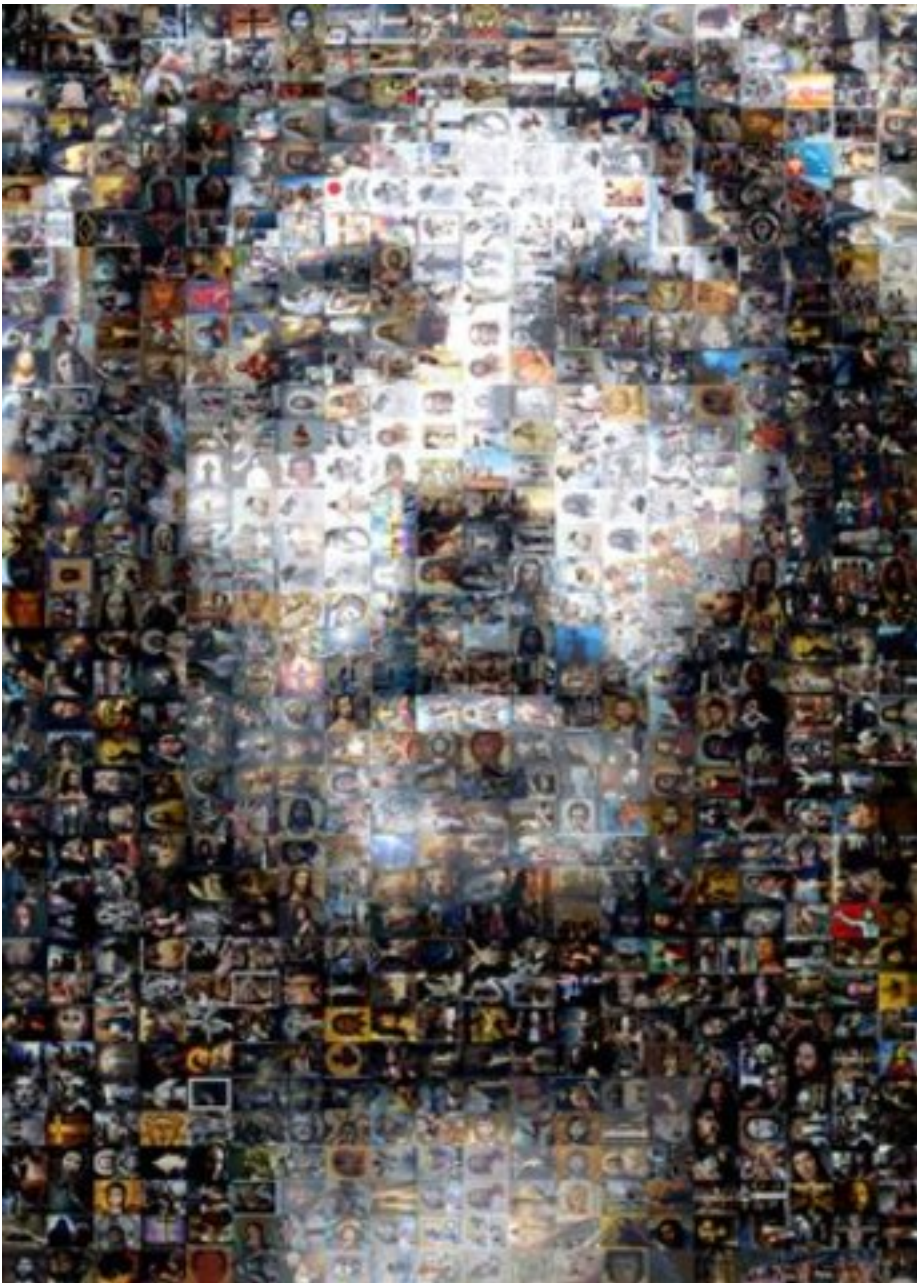
If we step back to see last weeks' reading, Now perhaps we can imagine that people made of all of the people this letter will go on to speak to, aliens, exiles, slaves, the disenfranchised, the scattered. Maybe they have not been treated as people before. Maybe we who cannot be a people the way we want right now, can see how vital it is that everyone be in community, and our vision will be expanded.

We can see how counter cultural this message is. And we can perhaps trust that God will continue to make us a people no matter what we face and that we should let ourselves be built.

"The genius of God's action is that there is death to counter every day, not just at Easter. There are oppressive structures to overturn every day, not just at Easter. There is life to be celebrated every day, not just at Easter."
Joy Douglass Strome.

1st Peter insists that the Christian life particularly equips believers with all they need to proclaim the mighty acts of the one who calls us out of darkness. It is enough to sustain us even in our greatest doubts.

There are many versions of the face of Jesus made of peoples' faces- here is just one.



¹ Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, revised and updated, Mark Alan Powell, General Editor with the Society of Biblical Literature, 2019. pp. 393-394