



**Elect Exiles – 1 Peter
Living Stones**

1Peter 2:4-10

March 14, 2010

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⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him
will not be put to shame."

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"

⁸and

"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Introduction

Well today's service has been a little different? It's good to do things a little bit different from time to time and it's especially good when you want to highlight something that might otherwise be overlooked in the regular routine of things. That's been the desire among us. Did you know that Calvary Memorial Church is a diverse congregation? Did you know that it's a multi-ethnic congregation with over thirty different nationalities represented in our worshipping body from week to week? We have nationalities represented from every corner of this globe: China, Colombia, Czech republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Greece, Guam, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Liberia, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Holland, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK and of course, the United States. Did you realize that perhaps you are sitting

by and worshipping side by side with someone who may be from another part of the globe? We are a diverse, multi-ethnic congregation. One of our desires in planning this “One in Worship” service is simply to identify the fact, and affirm that we are, by the grace of God, that kind of congregation. Why make much of it and take time to design a special service to highlight the fact? Perhaps if you are a skeptic or a cynic peering in from the outside to see what is going on today church, you may be tempted to think that that’s a rather trendy thing to do. It is quite politically correct to celebrate diversity in community these days. Perhaps it’s just about making us feel good about ourselves; it gives a good feeling to realize we are not a narrow-minded, culturally and ethnically monochromatic community. There is some diversity in our mix which makes us feel good. Perhaps that’s the main reason. Now, that’s not! None of those reasons are.

Three Reasons for being One in Worship

Here is the rationale behind this “One in Worship” service that we have designed for today.

1. The first, and most important reason, is to praise, glorify and worship God in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We are diverse people who have come out of our many different backgrounds to gather around the throne of the Lamb of God by means of God’s unifying Holy Spirit. We are here to praise, worship and glorify God because of it.
2. The second reason is to practice Christian love by appreciating and valuing the richness of our varied ethnic backgrounds and tongues. Identifying, affirming and recognizing who we are so that we can better love one another *for* who we are, and because of who God has made us in Christ to be. So, part of what we are doing here is to enable the congregation to better practice Christian love.
3. The third reason is this: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through our body and to our community.

That is what we are about here this morning: proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ *through* this diverse body and *to* our watching community. There is something about a diversity of peoples coming together for a common cause and finding their diversities, many though they are, transcended in and through the gospel so that they can love one another in the unity of the Spirit. There is something that commends the gospel about that.

God has designed his church to be something that a sociologist cannot explain: a diverse group of people from varied backgrounds gathering for a common purpose to magnify Jesus Christ, and thus, to proclaim his gospel—praising and glorifying God, practicing Christian love, and proclaiming the gospel in a way that commends it to our community. But in order to appreciate the full force of what is happening here this morning, I want to put it in a broader social context; you might even say a broader global context. In order to do that, I want to quote from the words of Christianity’s widest travelled evangelist, the Reverend Billy Graham, who said this in the mid-nineties. He said,

“Few issues trouble our world as persistently as the conflict between different races and different backgrounds. From the tensions in our cities that threaten to explode into violence at any moment” (as they did recently in Los Angeles as he is writing in the mid-nineties) “to the tragic ethnic strife in places like the Balkans in the former Soviet Union. This issue is surely the most fundamental social problem of our time.”

What do we do about that? Is there any solution for this great social problem? Is there any hope for the world, for the racial tensions that are so rife? We know them here in Chicago. What we are doing here in this One in Worship service is trying to raise, in our own little modest way here at 931 Lake Street, a banner of hope—a banner of hope to say, “There is a solution. There is hope for this most pressing social problem.” And the solution and hope is not in anything we are doing as a church. No, no, no! The solution is in what God himself is doing *in* and *through* his Gospel. That is where we can find hope!

God’s Spiritual House

What is God doing to overcome racial tension and ethnic strife, to magnify the unity that is ours in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? The answer takes us to our passage from 1 Peter 2. What is God doing to solve the human strife, the racial and ethnic division that has been part and parcel of human kind since the beginning when Adam plunged the human race into the chaos and mess we now find ourselves in? He is doing what is described there in Chapter 2:

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And so, what is God doing to bring hope amidst the strife and division of this world? How is he undoing what Adam has done? What God is doing is building for himself a spiritual house. Or, you might say that he is building for himself a temple on the earth; that is to say, a place where his presence can reside upon the earth, and through that, to extend his presence into all the earth. That is what God is doing! God is building a temple not only to maintain a presence in the world. He is building a temple of living stones to advance his mission in the world as well.

Living Stones

What is he using to build this temple? Peter tells us he is using “living stones.” I don’t know about you but everyone of the stones I have ever come across—whether it’ in a creek or on the side of the road, or those that tend to end up in my living room from my children—was decisively and decidedly dead stone, like this stone I’ve got in my pocket. This rock has no pulse, no feeling, no thoughts, doesn’t grow up or grow old, doesn’t get married; this stone is decisively and decidedly D-E-A-D! It’s dead! Do you remember what Jesus Christ said about God the Father? He said God is not the God of the dead; God is the God of the *living*. (Matt. 22:32) And because God is God of the living, our God, the God of the bible, cannot dwell in temples made by human hands. He cannot dwell in dead places made of brick and mortar; he cannot dwell in dead places made of steel and concrete. No, our God is the living God; therefore, he must inhabit a living place, a living temple. What is this living temple? It’s built with living stones. What are these living stones? They are people, human beings—that’s what these living stones are!

The Chief Cornerstone

God is building this spiritual house we see described here. He is building his temple in which to dwell and extend his presence into the entire world. He is building it with living

stones, with human beings. Human beings!—beginning with that most excellent of human beings, the Lord Jesus Christ, that most wondrous God-man. He is, as Peter says here, *the* living stone. Indeed he is the chief cornerstone, as Peter will say a little bit later and as many of the New Testament writers say: he is the chief cornerstone. He is the one from whom the rest of the Temple gets its bearing. He is the most critical; he is the most fundamental; he is the most central; he is the most important; without this cornerstone there will be no temple. That's who Jesus Christ is! And yet, God is building his temple not with Jesus Christ alone but with many, many, many living stones—with all, in fact, who come to him, the living Stone.

Did you see that precious promise in the beginning of verse 4? “As you come to him,” that is, the living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious. As you come to Jesus Christ, do you know what happens? You yourselves are swept up into the purposes of God! Amazing! And like living stones, God begins building you up as a spiritual house, as a temple in which he himself, God Almighty, is going to reside. So he is inviting you to come to him.

Have you come to him, whoever you are? Let me say it bluntly and candidly: there is no good reason not to come to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

- You can't claim race as the reason not to come to Jesus because this is not a white thing.
- And you can't claim ethnicity as a reason because this is not a North American, Western or European thing.
- You can't claim education as a hindrance to coming to the Lord Jesus Christ because this is not a Masters Degree or PhD thing.
- You can't claim gender as a reason because this is not a male thing.
- You can't claim socio-economic as a reason because this is not for the rich. There is no good reason why you cannot come unto the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Friends, you can't even claim your sin as the hindrance to keep coming to Jesus Christ.
- You can't even claim the mess that you have made of your life, the baggage that you would bring to Jesus may be a thousand miles long, you can't claim that as an excuse not to come to him.

Indeed, what is more, Jesus Christ loves the chief of sinners if that is who you think you are. He loves sinners, he welcomes them; he dines with them, he will dine with you if you will come unto him by faith and lay your sins, though they be stacked a mile high at his feet, at the foot of the cross he will welcome you with open arms. And indeed, the greater your sense of your own sin as you come unto him, the sweeter a Savior you will find Jesus Christ to be for you. So, come unto him. Come to me, Jesus says to you. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. All who are weary and heavy laden by the weight of sin, by the weight of condemnation, by the weight of a guilty conscience, you cannot reform your life enough to get away from or get around, or bring a quiet to—come unto me and I will take that from you, atone for it perfectly, all your sins past, present and future, and you will at last find rest. So, come unto me.

Many of you have come to the Lord Jesus Christ. To you, I'd like to invite you to look around the room this morning and to ask yourself what is it that I see as I look around. Do you see a bunch of rocks? Or do you see living stones?—living stones who might be as cool as you are,

but living stones who are chosen and precious in the sight of God Almighty. Take a second look around the room; do you see a roomful of independent individuals who happened to arrive by their own choice and determination at this same location on a Sunday morning? Or do you see a myriad of living stones so beautifully and intimately interconnected in a single spiritual house that is going to go on and on and on for all eternity? Is that what we see when we look at each other, living stones that work, connected massively and intimately to one another? That's reality!

I am not going to presume to apply what I am saying to your life as though the world out there is relevant, and I need to get the bible and apply it. Let's step into the amazing world that opens up to us *in* and *through* the Bible. That's reality! You and I, if we've come to Jesus, we are intimately connected and will go on like that forever and ever and ever and ever and ever! Ah! I'm never getting away from you, Brother! We are connected FOREVER. . . AND FOREVER! Just think about that. Just muse on the ethics that should flow from that sense of identity. You can sense it—there are no mere mortals here—you are in Christ Jesus!

Before I move on to the second point, can I just make one observation about a critical implication alluded to—the ethics that will flow from this in light of the fact that you are living stones and are being built up into this spiritual house. One of the profound implications which comes out of this is: biblically speaking, there are *no sacred places*; only living stones—nothing sacred about that woodwork up there; nothing sacred about the very attractive stain glass windows that I like. The only thing sacred that are *you* living stones where God is taking up residence. You can't send a letter to this place where God resides—not 931 Lake Street. The living stones called out from every tribe, and tongue and language and people.

A Royal Priesthood

There is another remarkable thing about these living stones that Peter points us to. As stones, they are what God is using to build his spiritual temple, but as something that is living, they are not only the thing by which God is building his house, they are the people who serve *within* that house. That is to say, you are not only living stones, you are also priests. This is what Peter calls us. See there in verse 5: we are also being built up, not only into a spiritual house, but also to a holy priesthood. Did you know when you came to Christ Jesus that you entered definitively into the priesthood forever? You, brother or sister, are a priest if you are in Christ Jesus, every one of you. You are being built into a holy priesthood. What is it that priests do? Priests do this—thus it is what you ought to do: priests usher people into the presence of God. Priests take people by the hand, or put a big arm around someone's shoulder and usher them into the presence of God.

I often say to my dear much loved colleague, Pastor Howard Duncan that “You are the consummate priest.” Why?—because Howard ushers people so gracefully and beautifully into the presence of God. Have you ever shared a burden of your heart with dear Brother Howard? You better be careful, he'll pray for you right on the spot. You might be out in the Portico or the Narthex, and boom!—he prays for you right on the spot. What is he doing? He is being a priest ushering you right into the presence of God right where you are. Or if he doesn't pray for you right from the spot, he is going to share a verse of Scripture with you that's been meditated on, or speak well of God to you, and through that he is ushering you into the presence of God. This is what priests do. Yet, this is not what Pastor Howard alone should be doing; this is what every one of you, who has joined irrevocably the holy priesthood God is building, should be doing

every single day of your life in whatever circumstance you find yourself—ushering people into the presence of God.

So, just as we saw with the first point—living stones—that there are no sacred places but living stones, so too we see with the second point—a holy priesthood—that there are *no sacred people*. The pastor is no more sacred than the lay folk. We are all to be not just living stones and a place for God's presence to dwell, but indeed, holy priests, to usher people into that very presence. We are all called to full time priestly service. So, make this practical by viewing your life in all of the network of relationships that you have—whether are a student in junior high or high school, a student in college, a young professional, a homemaker in your neighborhood, wherever you find yourself—understand that God has you in the midst of those relationships to serve as his priest, ushering those people into his presence by how you live, by what you say, by what you do—he has you there on purpose.

So, ask yourself: who around me needs to be ushered into the presence of the Lord today? Who can I whisk into the presence of the Lord as a priest? Perhaps it's a spouse, a son, or a daughter; perhaps it's a parent, a colleague at work, or a neighbor on your street, or a friend you need to call; perhaps it's a classmate, or the stranger that you meet at the checkout counter at the Jewel-Osco. Remember that everywhere you go and everything you find yourself involved with, you are there as priest of the living God.

A Priest's Work

A final question: how do priests usher people into the presence of God. How do priests in the Old Testament usher people into the presence of God? They have done it by offering sacrifices. A worshipper will come to the Temple and hand the offering over to the priest; the priest would validate it, sacrifice it, and offer the sacrifice unto the Lord, thus ushering the worshipper into the presence of God. This is also how it happens in the New Testament in God's new holy priesthood he is building in his people. Here is the good news: the sacrifice that you and I as priests offer to God are not animal sacrifices, not the blood of bulls and goats. Instead the sacrifice we offer is a human sacrifice. It's a human sacrifice that's a deeply personal because it's the sacrifice of our very selves, our very lives. Remember those brilliant words Paul uses to introduce Romans in chapter 12:

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers (and sisters), by the mercies of God, (in view of all of God's mercies that I have just rehearsed through chapters 1-11, all the mercies of God) to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What is that spiritual sacrifice in verse 1 that he's got in mind? What is the spiritual sacrifice you and I need to offer to usher people into the presence of God? He describes it in verse 9: We are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession," *that you may offer your spiritual sacrifice*. That is to say what he says there in verse 9: "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." It is a sacrifice of a transformed life by the mercy of God, that then proclaims with everything that life does, the excellencies of God in Christ Jesus. But how do you do that on a day to day basis? The Bible has many suggestions. May I mention just a few.

Speaking Well of God

One way is by speaking well of God before others. As you speak good words about God you are ushering people into the presence of God whether they know it or not. Hebrew 13:15, “Through him then let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” What a wonderful challenge for the high school students! O, that you would be bold, young people, bold and courageous as a lion! As you are mingling at the lockers or in the cafeteria and the peer pressure is stacked—feels like six hundred miles high—oh, that winsomely and prayerfully you would be able to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. This doesn’t mean singing “Jesus, I Love You” at the cafeteria table. This means acknowledging Jesus by what you say; you will usher your classmates right into the presence of God.

Give sacrificially and monetarily

Another thing that we can do is we can give sacrificially and monetarily. Amazingly, sacrificing money ushers people into the presence of God evidently. Check out what Paul says in Philippians 4:18, “I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” So as you give generously of your money and resources, it is a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. We can also usher people into the presence of God through good works, sharing what we have, Hebrews 13:16, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” My mind immediately goes to the Emergency Clothes Closet that we host here on Saturdays mornings, sharing what we have and by that offering a sacrifice pleasing to God, and we pray, ushering people into the presence of God as they see the Gospel manifested in and through our lives.

Suffer for the Sake of Their Faith

The other thing we can do is: suffer for the sake of their faith. Paul uses this vivid image where his life is being poured out like a drink offering, over the faith of the churches, serving and suffering for God. You can usher people into the presence of God by taking a risk to share the Gospel and suffering for their sake. Lastly, you do it by offering the sacrifice of prayer. There is a beautiful imagery in the book of Revelation where it talks about angels carrying golden bowls of incense that have an aroma that extends up before the very presence and face of God. This incense that causes God’s heart to thrill and rejoice is comprised of the prayers of all the saints (Rev. 5:8). So as you prayer for people you can usher them into the presence of God.

Conclusion

One in Worship has been our theme this morning, celebrating, identifying and affirming the unity we have in the Gospel. We are one in worship not because we worship under the same roof or in this particular facility, or in this service together or because we really want to be one in worship and created this service to get our minds around it so we can be and feel like we are one in worship. We are not one in worship because of anything we have done but because of what God has done through his Son, Jesus Christ, and is doing in the world. God is creating out of all the living stones in the world a spiritual house, a single spiritual house, a multi-ethnic,

multi-racial, multi-generation living temple where he is going to dwell, where he does dwell, and through which he is extending his presence into all the earth.

Abraham Lincoln is regarded widely as perhaps America's finest president and certainly one her greatest heroes. Lincoln had a remarkable life to begin with and ended trying to hold this country together during one of her darkest and challenging season. Yet historians will fight and say that ironically, it was his death rather than his life that did the most to bring a solidity and unity within this fractured country. Listen to the words of one historian:

It was not until Lincoln had been assassinated and his body seen firsthand by one and a half million people that something truly miraculous took place. As they saw Lincoln stretched to his giant's length in the coffin, they remembered with awe how cool and strong he had seemed through those four years of terror of the Civil War now miraculously ended. Remembering how he had been abused during his lifetime and how even his friends had mistaken his patience for weakness, the people began to revere him and seeing his body go back to the common soil amidst such a sobbing pomp and crowd, they understood that he had sacrificed himself for them. Dimly but with elemental power, they felt he had died out of love for the people, and under him at last, the nation had become, for the first time, one. In all questions of its division settled at last. It's unity cemented in blood.

Brothers and Sisters, that is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for his body, his church. He has made us one in and through his shed blood on the Cross. We are all living stones; we have attained in Christ a unity achieved and cemented in his blood. So we say with all the saints: Worthy are you, O Christ, "for you were slain, and by your blood you have ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God. And they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10)—to which I say: May it come soon. Soon and very soon, come, Lord Jesus. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let the one who hears—that's you—say Come. And let the one who is thirsty, so too, let them come. Let the one come who desires to take the water of life without price, so freely offered by Jesus Christ. And as we come, let us hear Jesus Christ himself saying,

"Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!