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Life with God is Life in Community 1 Peter 2.1-10

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If you're wise, one of the things you learn in life that's puzzling, fascinating, and at times frustrating is that people can look at the same thing – the same person, the same event, the same actions – and see vastly different things. How two people can look at the same person or the same event and perceive vastly different things is complex and depends, at least in part, on each person's previously held beliefs, psychological make up, cultural upbringing, education, and life experience. You might even say we're not seeing the same person or event. Though you're often unconscious of the fact that you do it, you tend to view people and events through lenses that confirm what you already believe. This is true about issues large and small.

It's important to understand this truth as we listen to **1 Peter 2:1-10** which is about Jesus and who we're called to be and how we're called to live as God's holy people. Peter makes the point that people look at Jesus and see vastly different things. Using the imagery of stones and rocks, Peter describes how some people look at Jesus and see **a living stone** who is precious and trustworthy and upon whom you can build your life. Other people look at Jesus and reject him as nothing special. Some people see Christ as a cornerstone and others as a stumbling block. Listen to **1 Peter 2:1-10**, **"Rid yourselves**, therefore, of all **malice**, and all **guile, insincerity, envy**, and all **slander**. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it **you may grow into salvation**— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4 **Come to him, a living stone**, though rejected by mortals **yet chosen and precious** in God's sight, **and 5 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. 6 For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion **a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious**; and whoever **believes** in him will not be put to shame."

7 To you then who **believe**, he is **precious**; but for those who **do not believe**, **"The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,"**

8 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.

9 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**.¹⁰ **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.**"

This passage begins with an invitation to **get rid** of some things and to long for and live into something new. Peter invites us to **get rid of** "*all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.*" The Greek implies a once for all action, like taking off a garment that you'll never put on again. Think of how many radio and television shows would cease to exist if Christians took this one verse seriously and didn't listen to or watch programming that largely features "*malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander.*" It would be the end of a great deal of talk radio and TV and the end of careers for people who've gotten rich peddling in these unholy and ungodly behaviors because too many people indulge in them every day. If we take God's Word seriously we should be getting rid of these vile, unhealthy, unhelpful, behaviors and not feeding them by what we watch and listen to on a daily basis. All of these ("*malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander*") have to do with how we regard, speak to and about, and treat other people. How do we get rid of attitudes and actions like that? We need God's help because sometimes the way we try to get rid of things isn't the best.

When Steve Tran of Westminster, California closed the door on 25 activated bug bombs, he thought he had seen the last of the cockroaches that shared his apartment. When the spray reached the pilot light of the stove, it ignited, blasting his screen door across the street, breaking all his windows, and setting his furniture on fire. "*I really wanted to kill all of them,*" he said. "*I thought if I used a lot more, it would last longer.*" According to the label, just two canisters of the fumigant would have been sufficient. The blast caused over \$10,000 damage to his apartment building. And the cockroaches? Tran reported, "*By Sunday, I saw them walking around.*"

Ridding yourself of malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander can be as difficult as trying to get rid of cockroaches. Some of us have probably made resolutions about getting our heart right toward others, not assuming the worst, improving our thoughts, behavior, and speech which is at least better than not seeking to change at all. Our efforts to extinguish these malicious and unholy behaviors are frequently futile. All of

them may re-emerge from the hidden crevices and cracks in our character at the worst possible moments because we haven't filled our soul with something else that takes their place. Rather than filling our mind, heart, and spirit with malice, envy, slander and the rest, Peter encourages us instead *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."* By pure spiritual milk Peter means we're to feed on God's word and fill our mind with God's truth about how we're to live as members of God's family and followers of Christ. As Paul says in **Philippians 4:8**, we're to focus on our thoughts on, *"whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **pleasing**, whatever is **commendable**, if there is any **excellence** and if there is anything worthy of **praise**, think about these things."* What are you feeding your soul with each day?

We need to ask God both for the desire and the ability to turn away from unholy habits in our lives by doing what Peter says next. *"**Come to him, a living stone**, though **rejected** by mortals yet chosen and **precious** in God's sight,"* Peter invites us to come to Jesus, a living stone, rejected by some people as insignificant, but chosen and precious in God's sight. People look at Jesus and see vastly different things. Wendy Vassalo of Dallas, Texas reported the story of a gem dealer who was walking the aisles at the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show one year when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, *"You want \$15 for this?"* The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10.

The stone was later certified as a natural star sapphire, one of the largest known of its kind. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. Some people look at Christ and they see something of limited value. Others see a living stone chosen and precious in God's sight and in our own. **What do you see when you look at Jesus?** This is an important question for every individual to answer. If we believe Jesus is who he claims to be and who the New Testament proclaims him to be it's life altering.

Not only does God invite us to come to Jesus Christ, but we're also invited to **let God reshape us**; notice the phrasing, *"let yourselves be built into a spiritual house."* We're invited to **let God** reshape us so we can be like living stones ourselves. If we see

Christ for who he is and come to him and allow God to work in us and reshape us, then God will do wonderful things with us and through us. The scripture doesn't say, "*Come to Jesus and build yourselves up into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.*" It says, "***Let yourselves be built.***" It is God who does the building just as Jesus says in **Matthew 16:18**, "*On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*" Jesus builds his church; God builds us up to be a spiritual house and holy priesthood dedicated to Jesus Christ. Our part is to humble ourselves and allow God to take the lead in shaping and guiding our life.

Are any of you familiar with the hobby of lapidary? Have you ever heard of it? Lapidary is a hobby which involves finding, buying, cutting, polishing, and setting precious and semi-precious stones. At our first church in Prospect Park, Pennsylvania our friends Howard and Dorothea Freeman did lapidary and they made lovely pieces. **In a sense, 1 Peter is saying, God is practicing lapidary on us.** Although some people may feel of little value or we may not see value in someone else, God looks at each one of us and at every single human being and sees someone precious who can be shaped and polished and made into a jewel. If we'll place ourselves in God's hands and let the Creator form us for God's purposes, God can reveal unseen value that others or even ourselves may have not seen or known.

What is God's purpose in shaping us and cutting away the unsightly or rough parts and polishing you up? The Divine Artist's hope is that you'll offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. As God's holy people we're called to offer sacrifices, but not the sacrifice of animals or grains or other things, but **the sacrifice of faithful obedience and the life of love that goes with that.** The sacrifice you're called to offer is a life without malice, guile, insincerity, envy, or slander which 1 Peter says you are to put off when you put on your faith. Speaking of the spiritual sacrifices God desires, **Psalms 40** states, "*You have given me an open ear.*" God wants us to listen to the Word and be obedient to it, offering ourselves to God by delighting to do God's will, writing God's law upon our heart, and sharing with others God's saving help, faithfulness, and steadfast love. Offering ourselves to the Lord moves us because God is precious to us as we are to the Lord.

One day a woman entered a Haagen-Dazs store on the Kansas City Plaza to get an ice cream cone. After making her choice, she turned around and found herself face to face with the actor Paul Newman who was in town filming the movie *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*. He smiled and said hello and his blue eyes caused her knees to shake. She managed to pay for her cone, then walked out of the shop, her heart pounding. When she began to regain her composure, she realized she didn't have her treat. She started back into the store and met Paul Newman again at the door. *"Are you looking for your ice cream?"* he asked. She nodded, unable to speak. Newman said, *"You put it in your purse with your change."* There is delight and joy in offering ourselves to God that can take our breath away.

Throughout 1 Peter 2 we hear a variety of things that God does for us. God provides the means for us to grow in our salvation by giving us the scriptures and the Spirit. God invites us to come to Christ and to let God build us up and shape us into precious followers of Jesus. God is the one who enables us to offer the right kind of sacrifices. God takes nobodies and turns us into somebody's. Once we were no people, now we we're God's people. Once we hadn't received mercy, we were stumbling and heading for a fall. Now God has set our feet upon a rock, making our steps secure. Once we were in darkness not knowing which way to turn. Now God has called us out the darkness into his marvelous light. What does God ask of us in return? That we live as God's holy, transformed, humble, grateful people and tell others what God has done; that we proclaim the mighty acts of God we've just mentioned. Isn't that a good deal?

Can you imagine how awful the seller of the sapphire felt after giving it away for \$10? How does one get over giving away an incredibly precious stone for ten dollars because you didn't see it for what it was worth? How do you sleep after doing that? How much worse is it not to see Jesus Christ for who he is and to fail to recognize his preciousness and value? That has eternal consequences not just financial ones.

Revelation 2:17 says to us, *"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it."* What a responsibility and privilege God has given us by placing people near all of us who look at Jesus and see a potato

shaped stone, not a precious gem. God also wants us to look at other people and see them as precious and valuable in God's sight.

There is much to be gained from living the truths expressed in 1 Peter 2, and a final one is that **life with God is life in community**. We're to be built into a spiritual **house** – you're not to be a Christian stone on your own. The imagery of who we're called to be is plural, "***you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people...Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.***"

We have seen that life in community in a beautiful and generous way this week at BBC as the church rallied around Greg and Mary Catherine O'Brien as we had a service for their son Conor on Wednesday and for the wedding of our son Greg and his wife Marci yesterday. So many people worked, served, volunteered their time and gifts and it was a lovely picture of how life with God is life in community. We are so overwhelmed with love and gratitude to everyone who helped us this week. Perhaps one of the most important lessons in 1 Peter in the time in which we're living is what it says about our identity. Christian identity *is* our identity. Christian community is our community, and the Christian family is our family. Especially in a time of ongoing tension and polarization it's important for us to remember that it's as Christians – not as any race or ethnicity, not as Republicans or Democrats or Independents, not as Americans or citizens of any one nation – that we're a chosen race. Peter says our identity as God's people transcends our particular ethnicity or nationality or any other identity.

All of us have been made a part of God's family by God's grace and mercy. We are to actively share the story of God's love, with those who don't know they have an invitation to belong and that there is mercy for every person who seeks it no matter who they are and what they may have done.

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we offer ourselves in obedience to you anew this morning, through the perfect offering of your Son, Jesus Christ, that living, chosen, and precious stone who has the power to save and transform us if we allow him to. We thank you that you have called us to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, your own people; and to you, O God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be blessing and honor and glory and power forever. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. 1 Peter 2:1 says, “*Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.*” What are some things you’d like to get rid of in your life? What are some things you think God would like you to “get rid of?”
2. How are you actively striving to grow spiritually and in your relationship with God – see 1 Peter 2:2?
3. 1 Peter refers to Jesus as “*a living stone.*” Take note of all the times and ways that stones and rocks are mentioned in 1 Peter 2:1-10; what is Peter communicating with these images?
4. How are we as a community of believers “being built into a spiritual house?” What role do you play in making that happen? How do your spiritual gifts, passions, and experiences factor into your place in the “house?”
5. How does it make you feel to know that as part of God’s people we are chosen, royalty, God’s possession with a mission to fulfill?
6. How does our receiving the mercy of God impact how we treat others?