

Sermon Text for January 30, 2022

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Exodus 32:30-34, I Peter 2:1-5

“Called to be living stones”

As we find ourselves buttoned down in the midst of a winter storm it is nice to be able to do something that brings our focus and our attention to God and the awesome and majestic and pervasive presence of God in our midst. I am thrilled by how many of you are following along in our 9 month read through the Bible Challenge. If you are not, don't worry or fret, you can always pick up and join us right now today, even if today is a day off. It has created a space where can reflect on God's presence as we daily go to him in Scripture. I hope it gives us a bit of a bird's eye view on what our life is like as we examine the lives of those called by God to be His people. We are called to be God's people, the followers of Jesus Christ. That means something.

Today we are reminded that we are unique and what makes us unique. As we ordain and install elders and deacons and trustees into the church we recognize that not just as Presbyterians are we unique in that we lay hands on those who are called to lead us and to work in a way that is called out by God for us. But the bird's eye view requires that we understand that every person who is here in this sanctuary is unique, is called to live in a way that is pleasing in God's sight. Each one of us is called to be living stones.

Both of our Scriptures demand and require a certain life style as a result of who we are. We come face to face today with the question of what makes us different from those around us in society and culture. What would be missed if this church did not exist? Actually, we have a long list of items from our preschool, to our children's programs, to our social ministries like our food bank and our emergency student housing, and the list continues with our women's Bible Study for the community. We would be missed as a church, without a doubt.

But what if we were to pass away, individually, this is where we move from the communal to the personal, how would we be missed. Yes, of course, our family would miss us, but what about beyond that? How are you viewed by those around you? Are you seen as unique, as a follower of Jesus, as our Scripture state today, are we seen in our lives as living stones? We should, not just as ordained and installed officers, but as disciples of Jesus Christ. Let's read.

READ

We don't often preach from I Peter but it is where we find ourselves in our Bible readings for this week. If you notice we have begun a new sermon series and it is based upon the Bible readings that we are going through together. Don't worry, if you aren't following us in the readings you will not miss anything, well, that doesn't sound right. You are missing a lot, but each week we will be looking at a reading from the week and so you can jump right in as we look at them every Sunday morning.

So I Peter, we read that together on Friday, the entire book. Peter, who is thought to be the apostle, the disciple of Jesus who you know denies him three times, and yet Jesus says that upon the statement he made, that Jesus is the Christ, he will build the church. Peter has always been considered the lead apostle and the one upon whom much responsibility rested.

But he is writing after 70 AD which is when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and persecuted horrible the Jewish people who scattered all around the globe. This scattering of the people of God is called the diaspora and in that scattering the Christians were caught up because they were considered just another sect of Judaism. So Peter is writing to those Christians who were scattered as a result of the persecution of the Jews by the Roman empire. What are supposed to do as people of faith living all around the globe and how are we supposed to comport ourselves. In the first chapter of I Peter he tells the people simply, be holy in your living, just as Christ was holy.

This is our calling card. We are each called to live lives that would be defined as holy. This section that we are looking at this morning was basically about being a new people of God. As Christians we can't help but break some of our past ties and some of our past actions. When we worship together there has to be some impact on our lives, and the least that we should see is that those actions and those thoughts and those lifestyles that we used to have that separated us from God, would be removed, would be changed, would simply be different. This isn't just for the ordained and the installed, this is for all of us.

So Peter tells us in vs. 1 to rid ourselves of those things which are not of God and he gives us a list. He tells us in vs.2 that to substitute what we used to long for, malice, guile, insincerity, envy, slander, we ought to long for the spiritual milk that will help us grow in our salvation. What is this spiritual milk? This that he describes us as tasting and seeing that it is good? Look at Psalm 34:8 and what do we read? O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

Our purpose here in this sanctuary is to take refuge in him so that we can drink the milk that is the spiritual milk that will then have an impact once we leave this place. We do not gather

merely to be impacted for an hour or two of our life. In vs.4 we see that our time together here is for the purpose of being brought to the living stone, that would be Jesus, who was not well received by those around him.

So how do we come to the living stone? Yes, in our worship, but when else do we come to Jesus who is our living stone? You see, Jesus has a very specific and clear purpose for each one of us. In our Sunday school class we are studying spiritual gifts and we recognize that God has given each of us gifts. Now, the premise of these spiritual gifts we have said is not so that we can live better lives in Jesus, I mean that does happen, but so that these gifts can be used to advance the kingdom through the church. It is through the church that we are able to use the gifts that God gives us, whether it be service or hospitality or prophecy, or whatever they may be.

Peter describes us then in vs.5 as living stones and our role is to passively allow God to build us into a spiritual house. Are you allowing God to build you as a living stone into a spiritual house, a dwelling place for his Holy Spirit? I know, some of you may not have signed up for this. I just want to come and see my friends and hang out and that's the end of the story, fellowship is all that I'm looking for, and maybe a place for my kids, or maybe some community while I'm living alone. But God says that we have to long to be living stones that can be used to build up a spiritual house, this church is to be a spiritual house that is constructed by you, the living stones.

When Moses in Exodus approaches God and asks for forgiveness for the people it is after they had worshipped a golden calf, it is after he took some people with him and slaughtered large percentage of those who were unfaithful, and still he says to God, please forgive the people, and if you can't, then take my life as a substitute for theirs. I will die in their place. Without a doubt there will be punishment for those who are not living stones, and who are not willing to be built into a spiritual house, but we have one who is faithful who already died for us in Jesus Christ, and so God will never, ever remove His presence from us because of Jesus.

Salvation is not seen as a last minute rescue operation from the outside but as the fitting consummation of a process already at work in and among Christian believers. The purpose of spiritual growth is salvation. I know that there are some out here today who do not know Jesus as a personal savior and see their time here at the church more as a civic time and less than a building of a spiritual house. It is not too late, come to the one who has sacrificed his life for your sake, and redeemed you from sin so that you can be a part of the building of His spiritual house, be a living stone.

Jesus, when he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is chastised because the people were going crazy after him. He says, even if the people were silent, the rocks themselves would shout his praises. We are the living stones called to shout out God's praises because we have tasted that he is good.

God is using us to build a spiritual house. How are you a part of that building process? If you think you have to wait until our life has ceased to benefit from the building of this house, think again. Listen to the Psalmist in Psalm 27: I believe I shall see, I shall taste, I shall feel, I shall smell, the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, right now. Give your life to Jesus and allow yourself, as a living stone, to be a part of the building of this spiritual house. Amen.