

Living Like Rock Stars  
1 Peter 2:1-10  
July 23, 2023  
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Let me tell you about the first time I preached on this passage in this space. It was July 19, 2009 – over 14 years ago – and I was standing in this very spot preaching my audition sermon to the congregation at Crestwood Christian Church. The following Sunday, the church would decide – based on this one sermon – whether or not they wanted to call me as their next senior pastor. No pressure! True story: while I waited in the hotel lobby to be picked up that morning, I was reading over my sermon and a button fell off my dress shirt. I knew I shouldn't have had that second bagel! The hotel clerk got a needle and thread and talked me through sewing the button back on like she was talking me through landing a 747 jetliner with a blown engine.

In that July 2009 sermon, I talked about my very first visit to Crestwood earlier that year, when Wayne Shaver, the search committee chair, sneaked me into the church so I could check it out. We had to crawl through a couple air ducts and hide behind a plant or two, but we made it.

The first thing I did was stand in the pulpit. It was the Sunday after Easter, which may explain why when I got to the pulpit, I found...rabbit droppings. Wayne explained to me those were fake rabbit droppings left by the choir for the minister. I had two thoughts: (1) What kind of people does this church let into their choir? and (2) this is my kind of church! Apparently, I didn't screw up too badly, because 14 years later here I am. Incidentally, that sermon was called, "Who Are You?"

Have we answered that question yet? I'm still asking that about the choir, but it's more like, "Who ARE you?" We've certainly gotten to know each other better over these past 14 years, but I don't think that we can fully say we know each other. That's because we are constantly changing, learning, growing, so there's not a static answer to that question. You're not the same congregation. Many folks are gone and many have made this their church home. Each time we are together, we are getting a better sense of who we are, as individuals and as a community of faith, but we are also constantly in the process of becoming something more. Each day, we are working toward becoming the kin-dom of God here on earth.

The audience to whom Peter was writing was undergoing the same kind of transformation and were struggling with the question, "Who are we?" The readers would have been made up of new believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who had given their life to following Jesus the Messiah sent from God. During this period in history – probably around the 60s or 70s – Christ followers would have been in the extreme minority, and would have been facing intense pressure to give up their belief in Jesus and return to their native religions. So, Peter writes this letter to encourage them to stay strong in the face of persecution, because through their suffering they are participating in the suffering Jesus went through for their sakes. In other words, this letter is Peter's "Hang in there!" to his readers.

One of the ways he does this is by reminding them of who they are. They are no longer Jews or Gentiles. They are not just a collection of individuals. They are not religious fanatics. Through their faith in Jesus, they have become something more than they've ever been, and it's that knowledge that should strengthen them in the face of the challenges they are enduring. Peter says, "Who are you? You are Christians."

Peter chooses an interesting metaphor to make his point: “As you come to him, the living Stone, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.” Comparing believers to stones would have been familiar to Peter. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, Peter answered, “You are the Christ,” and Jesus responded, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” So, Peter, whose Greek name Petra means “rock,” was the original rock star, and he was now telling his congregation that they were also rock stars, something they shouldn’t take for granite. Get it?

Living stones. Quite an oxymoron, isn’t it? Like “heated igloo” or “safe bungee jump” or “funny preacher.” We shouldn’t be surprised Peter uses such a self-contradicting term, because the Bible is overflowing with them. After all, faith itself is an oxymoron, because the author of Hebrews says faith is believing in things you can’t see. An oxymoron. Like crucified savior. Or the least shall be greatest, the last shall be first. Living stones. In this topsy-turvy world of faith, we are walking, talking oxymorons, living stones built together into this spiritual house.

“Built together,” Peter says. That goes against the individuality our culture encourages us to pursue, doesn’t it? So, the tension between who we’re told to be by the world and who Peter says we are creates another oxymoron for us: an individual Christian. Peter would say there’s no such thing, because you can’t do much with just one stone. Actually, you can do some destructive things with it. Break out a window. Dent a car. But if you take a group of individual stones and put them together, you can do something constructive, like build a bridge or a house or a church. We are called to be living stones, submitting our lives to God so that God can use us to build something greater than we could have ever imagined – a spiritual house, a bridge from “on earth” to “as it is in Heaven,” the kin-dom of God. Each one of us has our place in that building process.

When I served in Chicago, one of the first things I had to do was teach my church how people in God’s country talk. First, I had to teach them how to say “Louisville.” Then I had to teach them that, where I was from, there’s no such thing as a singular second-person pronoun. We don’t say “you.” We say “y’all.” Now, this is not just about dialect or colloquialism; this is highly theological. In this way of thinking, there’s no such thing as an individual. Even one person is “y’all.” Everyone is an individual in the midst of a community, part of the kin-dom, a brick in the collective spiritual house God is creating with us and through us.

So based on Peter’s definition, maybe instead of asking each other, “Who are you?” I should ask a different question: “Who is God building y’all to be?” How closely are we coming to resembling a spiritual house, a holy place where individual stones can find their place in God’s kin-dom? Do people see in us the handiwork of the Great Architect? Frank Lloyd Wright once said, “The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant vines.” Are we planting vines to cover up the work of God in our lives, or are we living our lives in such a way that the Great Architect is visible for all to see?

God’s work should be visible in us, because, as Peter reminds us, we are more than a random grouping of people who happened to end up at Crestwood on a Sunday morning. Remember, his original readers would have been struggling with their new-found Christian identity, and would have been hearing from other people that they were wrong, they were misled, they were stupid for believing in Jesus. Peter counters by reminding them - and us - that they are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Really? Does he know who he’s talking about? I could see saying that about some of the giants of faith...but me? Y’all? A royal priesthood? A holy nation?

Such lofty words should make us think twice. Do we act in such a way to deserve such titles? Do we treat others as if we have been chosen by God? Do we make decisions that project our holiness? As living stones, are we building something or are we just lying around, waiting to be put to use? Remember, you are a rock star. You are a living stone. You are the church. The church is y'all. Where you go, the church goes. When you talk about other people, are you the church? When you interact with wait staff and salesclerks, are you the church? When you think about something you disagree with, are you the church? If not, you're planting thick, choking vines that are covering up God's love in you.

That love is not earned or deserved, but it is given to us nonetheless. You are who you are because of what God has done for you. For once we were not a people. Once we had not received mercy. Once we were in the darkness. And then God did something else with a stone – he rolled it away from a tomb, and out walked our hope, our light, our new life. We have been given this amazing, undeserved gift in Jesus Christ. That gift is for you. That gift is for me. It's not our gift to hoard; it's our gift to share.

This is not the church. This is a building made of lifeless bricks and mortar. People are not going to come to this church because of the beautiful grounds or the amazing architecture or the spacious Mission Center. They are going to come here because they've been watching you and they see something there, something they want to know more about. They've seen what is being built here, and they want to know if there's room for their stones, their gifts, their questions. They want to be a part of something bigger than they are, they want to make a difference. And your call as the church is simply to invite them to make room for them, to find a place for their stone in this house, to help them connect to God and to each other in this kin-dom.

Who are you? I know who you are. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. You are the church. Never ever underestimate how God is working through you where you are each and every day. You are living stones, built together into a spiritual house. You are the church. Not just right now, not just today. At work, at home, in the community, every day, you are chosen by God. You are part of the royal priesthood. You are holy. You are rock stars! You are the church.