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The Fifth Sunday of Easter

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Jesus Is the Only Way to God

All human beings are born with an innate longing for God. They strive to identify God and then find a way to approach him. Jesus proclaims who the true God is and then shows the world that he—and only he—can lead the world to God. We put our trust in Jesus and then share Jesus with the world.

First Reading

Acts 4:8-12

Salvation is found in no one other than Jesus.

Second Reading

1 Peter 2:4-10

The living Stone builds a spiritual house made of living stones.

Gospel

John 14:1-11

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Sermon

1 Peter 2:4-10

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Who am I? This is the ultimate question of life, who am I? Philosophers and psychologists wrestle with this question and we often do too. We would all answer this question in different ways, especially at different stages of our lives. The answer reveals how we see ourselves; it reveals our identity. As we mature and change, our identity often changes as well. Many times, the changing of identity goes unnoticed. Sometimes, this change is noticed, which causes internal tension. This is otherwise known as an identity crisis. Effectively, an identity crisis is a time when you are uncertain about who you are because of a life change, expected or unexpected. A college student might go through an identity crisis when they don’t get their dream job, which they prepared for the last four years. A parent might go through an identity crisis, when their last child leaves the house to start their adult life. In that moment, they might ask, “who am I now?” Ultimately, this crisis occurs because their life was built around a changing identity.

For Christians, identity is an especially important issue because God has given Christians a stable, unchanging identity. This identity is built around Christ and God has given it to Christians, completely independent of their work. Therefore, they never need to have an identity crisis. Yet, Christians often struggle with their identity, especially in the middle of stress and struggle. This is when the devil works his hardest to get Christians to give up this identity. The moment they do, they are lost forever. This is why Peter reminds Christians of their identity in their struggle, to bring them back to God.

Are you having an identity crisis?

Remember who you are and live that way.

But, before Peter reminds the Christians who they are, he reminds them of who Christ is. **“As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him.”** Why does Peter call Jesus “the Living Stone?” Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God used this picture of a stone to show the two ways Jesus would be treated. Peter wants Christians to remember this. God would choose Jesus to save his people and be the foundation of their faith. However, men would reject Jesus for that same position, and, in turn, God would reject them.

Then, Peter describes Jesus in three ways. First, he calls Jesus the “living” Stone. “Living” is a strong contrast from what a stone is typically considered, dead and cold. But Peter uses “living” as a strong reminder of Jesus’s identity, he lives. He has risen. He has beaten death forever. He will not die again. This is the core of their hope.

Second, Jesus is God’s chosen stone. Average homes during Peter’s time were built out of stone, often rough and unshaped. However, in most of the ruins, there is one stone that is different, the cornerstone. A builder would spend a long time looking carefully for this stone because it was the most important stone. It was going to guide the construction of the rest of the house. If it was not quite right, the rest of the house would not be either. So, builders carefully selected this one stone, while rejecting many others. Jesus is that chosen stone, set aside for his purpose.

Third, Jesus was precious. When you think of precious stone, what do you think of? Diamonds, rubies, and gems of all kinds are precious stones. Could you imagine the value of a house that had a massive diamond as its cornerstone? It would be astronomical. With that value, it must be for a special purpose. A house built on Jesus would be even more precious than that. God uses Jesus as his precious stone for the cornerstone of his house, because he would live there personally. It’s hard to imagine someone using a precious stone for one part and using common stones for every other part of the house.

After showing the immense value and purpose of Christ, Peter then shows the value and purpose of believers. **“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.”** God made them living stones like Christ. Apart from Christ, these stones had no value of their own. They should have been rejected as worthless. Yet, God chose them and made them precious through his Son. Now, they have an incredible value to God.

They are not only precious and chosen but living like Christ. They were dead because of their sins. However, Christ made them alive. Paul writes the same thing in Ephesians, “Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”

Why does God put all this effort into making living stones? He wants to build them into a forever home where he lives. He will dwell among them forever and they will never be removed from the place that God placed them. This is the new identity and purpose of believers!

However, isn’t it easy to forget that identity and purpose? When stress and struggles come along, it can be easy for Christians to forget who they are. Then, they begin to see themselves as the world does, just another brick in the wall, worthless and common.

Have you ever seen a stone arch, like in an old cathedral? In building a stone arch, the most important stone is the last stone place, known as the key stone. The keystone needs to be the right shape and strength. All the other stones push against it and if it is properly chosen, the arch can support a lot of weight. If not, a little weight will cause the whole

thing to crumble down. The same is true of a you. Your life is an arch and is based around one key identity. If the wrong strength or shape keystone is chosen and the right one is rejected, it can cause not only an identity crisis but also the loss of one's faith.

So, what is your keystone? What one key identity do base your life and decisions around? What one part, if it was removed, would cause an identity crisis? Our sinful heart has plenty to choose from, whether it be our jobs, our families, our health, our hobbies, our pride. These things aren't wrong, unless they replace Christ. What is your keystone? Remember, there is only one correct keystone and a lot of wrong ones. When one keystone is chosen, another is rejected. Choosing anything but Christ means rejecting him. Rejecting Christ means being rejected by God and having no part in his house.

What does God do though? He allows and brings in difficulty and stress to remind us to have Christ as that keystone. Because as our life comes crumbling down, we only have one place to turn, him. In his love, he continues to forgive us for choosing the wrong stone and he continues to give us the right one.

Since God has made his people into living stones, how are these living stones to live? **"...offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."** As living stones, God's people are also priests. In the Bible, priests were a specially chosen group of people from one family that was chosen to work directly before God. One of their important jobs was to offer animal sacrifices for the sins of the people. These Christians are to offer a different type of sacrifice, a spiritual sacrifice because Jesus already took away their sins. The spiritual sacrifices were to live their lives as God commanded. Peter explains in the following verses. In verse 11, they are told to abstain from sinful desires. In verse 13, they are told to submit to every human authority. If they are a servant, they are to submit to their masters. Wives are to submit to husbands and husbands are to love and respect their wives.

These sacrifices are pleasing to God. This is how God wants us to live, in service to others. In serving others, we are offering pleasing sacrifices to him. This will naturally happen as our life is shaped and formed around him.

Who am I? Who are you? You are God's chosen stone to be part of his forever home. Whenever you have an identity crisis, remember who you are and then live that way. Amen.

Vicar Mark Zondag