

Jesu Juva

“Christians in an Unchristian World: Unity”

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We began our meditation on First Peter last week with a consideration of *who you are*, and that while the world and even we ourselves may answer that question in a myriad of ways and from a host of different perspectives, there is one answer from our Lord: you are my baptized child, Christian, redeemed, saint. And that identity trumps all others. And in that identity and reality, we are called to holiness - to live a life set apart. Set apart from sin, set apart from the ordinary, set apart to live in and according to the Word of God and His forgiveness.

Today, Peter builds on that reality and identity. That's who you are, but that's not all there is to it. There's more to the story, more blessing, more grace. For when you are baptized into Christ, you are baptized into a community, into a Church, ***a spiritual house, a holy nation, a people of God***. That is also your identity, a reality greater than just being on your own, or just “you and Jesus.”

This is not new to Peter and his letter. All the Scriptures speak of God's people this way: as a group, a community. And when there are individuals, like Moses and Abraham, they are called to be the beginning of a community that will come from or be formed around them. In the beginning God said it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18), and that is still true. In all times and places. God gathers the solitary into homes (Psalm 68:6) and into churches. You are not on your own or by yourself; you are part of a body, a building. And not just in this time and place, but one that God has been building from the beginning and which is not finished yet. With you and I now, people long gone, and people yet to come. Crossing time and place, for such things are no barrier to God.

And so, Peter says, you are ***living*** - not dead - ***stones***, being ***built*** together into ***a spiritual house***, on the foundation of ***Christ, the cornerstone***.

Yet even though this is not a new teaching, it is a particularly challenging one, especially in our day and age today, which values rugged individualism, stresses self-sufficiency, and treasures self-definition and achievement as perhaps never before. And this aided and abetted by technology, which has created the paradox that we live in today. For technology has made the world never smaller, and yet the distances between us seem never greater. We can have hundreds or thousands of virtual friends and followers, and yet do not even know the people who live next door to us. The neighborhood church used to be the place of gathering and socialization, but now it is the chat room, web sites,

video interaction, and more. The world has never been so crowded, and yet people never so alone.

That is not to bash or trash technology. It is a good gift from God and is only good or bad in the use we make of it. It is simply the reality we live in today. The people in Peter's day lived in a far different reality, and yet one in which they found themselves alone and separated too - because of the persecution that had scattered them far and wide, and isolated them in fear. Theirs a forced, and perhaps ours a willing, division and isolation.

But just as we are *more* than how we define ourselves, so we are *more* than where we live and who we find ourselves to be around, or not. Ours is a unity, Peter says, that exceeds whatever divisions this world and it's prince can mete out - our unity in Christ. We are members of His Body, joined to Him through water and the Word, forgiven our sins and raised with Him to a new life. But Peter also provides this image for you: of a building, a temple, of which you are *a living stone*.

Think about that for a moment. What does that mean? It means you've been put where you are by the builder. You fit there. You stand on the shoulders of the ones under you, and support the ones above you. You stand side-by-side with those next to you. Those stones around you might have pointy edges, rough spots, holes, bumps, and all kinds of imperfections. No matter. You have them too. They are different than you and yet one with you in this building, this building of Christ, His Church. And without you, there'd be a hole. *You matter*.

I know it may not always seem like it. You may be smaller than some other stones, or older, or not as strong, or not as beautiful. Yet you matter here, in the place God has put you, both to Him and to the other stones. And to those stones yet to be added to the building. You're there for them, too.

And so what we do we do *together*. You don't necessarily hear that in the English, for the word "you" is both singular and plural. But it is plural for Peter. What we do we do together, and what we do impacts others - whether we realize it or not. And so Peter spends the second half of the chapter spelling some of that out - how we live with others, and why. And just like last week, it's not going to be easy. Peter's hearers were Christians scattered all through an unchristian world, and even you and I today will leave this place and live in the midst of a world increasingly hostile to Christ, His Word, and His values.

But what we do and how we live is not dependent on whether the world is friendly or receptive to us or not. It is simply how we live as this Body, this building of Christ, for the glory of His Name. And so we are subject to the government. We are careful to curb our sinful urges - both for the sake of others and for the Name of Christ. We are subject to our earthly superiors, our masters at home and at work. And if others do not do the

same? If they repay us evil for good? If they do not help but hurt? . . . so they did to Christ. And you have His grace, His care. For ***He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree*** of the cross - to forgive us when sin controls us and not righteousness, and that His wounds might heal our wounds. ***For [we too] were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

Shepherd. Overseer. At the end of this chapter, Peter introduces yet another image for you, that you are a part of: the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd. And no matter where you are, who is around you, or how they are treating you, you have this Good Shepherd watching over you and providing for you as part of His one flock. For though you may feel isolated and alone, scattered and divided, you are not. You live in a unity and fellowship that transcends all earthly boundaries, and heavenly ones too. For you are the people of God. Each of you and all of you. And where you are is just right, with God using you in ways known and unknown.

And one more thing: do not neglect the Word of God, for that, Peter says, is your ***pure spiritual milk***, what will sustain you and strengthen you and give you growth. So hear it, read it, pray it, be washed in it, eat it. For ***you have tasted that the Lord is good***, and ***blessed*** are all who take refuge in Him (Psalm 2:12).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.