

<sup>4</sup>Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and <sup>5</sup>like living stones, let yourselves be built<sup>[a]</sup> into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him<sup>[b]</sup> will not be put to shame."

<sup>7</sup>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," <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,<sup>[c]</sup> in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>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 is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Joshua 24:14-16 pg 216 OT

<sup>14</sup>"Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup>Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

<sup>16</sup>Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup>for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; <sup>18</sup>and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

### ***The Church's One Foundation***

Knowing one's true identity can be transformative. It can be life-changing. Knowing who you really are can be transformative.<sup>1</sup> In her book, "*Warriors Don't Cry*", Melba Pattillo Beals remembers being a 17-year-old African American girl living in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, when she and eight other students integrated Central High School. Segregationists defied the Supreme Court's edict to integrate and attempted to halt it. The African American students, known as the Little Rock Nine, experienced tremendous adversity in their quest for acceptance by the white majority. Melba Beals was motivated to continue the fight for integration by her wise Grandmother India who said, "*We are God's ideas [and] you must strive to be the best of what God made you to be.*"<sup>2</sup> Melba states that her grandmother gave her the gift of identity. How important it was to know that, as a young black woman, she was "God's idea."

In this text this morning, the writer, probably not the apostle Peter, but yet who we will call Peter, seems intent on transforming his beleaguered audience of Greek Christians by telling them clearly just who they are in the eyes of their Lord. He is intent on giving them purpose and telling them of their new heritage as baptized disciples. You see, they are a people in pain, people who are suffering as resident aliens, strangers in their own homes. Many are house servants, or they are spouses of non-believers, and they live in a pagan Roman culture, in patriarchal homes. They are being ridiculed, abused and alienated by their families. They are being treated as threats in their society. They are, in many respects, slaves, bound by the social and political conventions of their world.<sup>3</sup> All of this is due to their belief that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and due to their practice of his principles.

Peter begins to transform their identity with a potent image. Without a physical temple to worship in, he tells them that they will become a spiritual temple... they themselves. He tells them that they are living stones who are being built by God into a place where God lives, that is, God's spiritual house, "*oikos pneumatikos*". This is not of their own doing, but of God's. In Peter's analogy, Jesus is part of the spiritual house, in fact, he is the foundational piece, the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeannine K. Brown. "Commentary - 1 Peter 2:2-10." [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3254](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3254). (accessed 1/17/20).

<sup>2</sup> Melba Beals. "*Warriors Don't Cry*" (New York: Simon Pulse, 1995), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Deffenbaugh. "Commentary - 1 Peter 2:2-10" [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=909](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=909). (accessed 1/17/20).

cornerstone. Using OT prophesy, Peter reminds them that Jesus is the cornerstone who was rejected by humanity, but yet is of the greatest value to the house of God, the piece on which all of it must be built. They are stones made in his own image, and their purpose is to together, as God's temple, "offer up spiritual sacrifices.

As Peter's analogy proceeds, it is clear that these new believers share also in Jesus' future. Even as they are currently rejected and maligned by their neighbors and families who do not yet believe, THEY will be honored with life forever in glory as believers. Ultimately, through Peter's words, they are not only given purpose but hope. They are given an identity as God's people. They have become a holy priesthood. Can you hear the joy? Listen to it, the joy of revealed identity, transforming words. Listen to the wonderful antiphonal liturgy? "*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.*" (vs 10)

*A few years ago, one of the seminary students at Union Seminary, as part of her senior thesis project, carefully planned a worship service that was led by homeless people. She had worked with an agency called Picture the Homeless as part of project. The focus of the worship service was to remember the hundreds of people buried on Hart Island (New York City's potter's field), where the poorest of the poor are laid, most without anyone knowing their names. They are buried without a religious service; without their lives being honored. The goal of Picture the Homeless and the service was to move the city's officials to allow religious observances on the island for all such people. Some of those leading the service could not read, so they memorized their parts, but all led with power and grace. Dawn led the opening litany; Robert read the story of Lazarus and the rich man—then preached an impromptu sermon. Others told their own stories of living on the streets. At the front of the chapel, a large sheet had been stretched between two tall candle stands. On it had been written many, many anonymous names of people who had been buried at Potter's Field. There were a lot of "Jane and John and Baby Does". The names seemed to be written on the sheet in a scattered, haphazard pattern. At the close of the service, each person of the congregation was given a*

*purple “Post It” note. They were invited to come forward and write the name of one of those on the large sheet onto their “Post It” and then stick that “Post It” over that name on the sheet. One by one people went forward to put their “Post its” on top of one of the names. Once all the purple “Post-its” were up, and the congregants sat down, it was then obvious that that the anonymous names had not been written in a random fashion at all. The purple “Post-its” showed the names to spell out the words: WE ARE HERE. We are here. We are here, even though we were buried without names. We are here, even though most others did not meet our eyes on the street. “Once we were not a people...but now we are God’s people.”<sup>4</sup>*

Friends, we are God’s people too. We are God’s precious stones. beloved and accepted, with a prized place in God’s house too, a house held together by that living stone, that foundational stone, Jesus Christ. We are God’s own, and we have been brought from darkness to light to proclaim God’s wonderful acts of mercy. We are a group of disciples called together to be a house, not built with bricks and mortar, but with lives laid side by side, on top of each other, so interconnected that together we form a community in which God is present. We are a house, a temple for God to live in, a place where, as in the Temple of ancient Jerusalem, lives are reconciled to God and each other, where spiritual sacrifices are offered for the world.

You know, it’s not too hard to be ones who offer ourselves as spiritual sacrifices for the world. By our simply being confident, radiant, shining stones, Jesus will, thorough us, shine tolerance and hospitality to strangers in OUR culture. He will shine rest for the exhausted and overworked, shine support to those who seek refuge from the world’s violence, and he will shine welcome and companionship for those abandoned and alone. By our simply being “God’s abundance is enough” people, by our being “can’t help but invite” people, by our being “gotta share the love I know” people, by our being “take my hand and lean on me” people, Jesus establishes relationships which will enlarge his household. It’s part of our being made living stones in it. It’s part of our being the body of Christ...Christ, the Church’s 1 foundation.

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Lundblad. “Homiletical Perspective. 1 Peter 2:2-10” In: DL Bartlett, BB Taylor, ed. “Feasting on the Word.: Year A. Vol 2. (Louisville: WJKP; 2010), 463-4.

Friends, brothers and sisters, our Session has said, “Yes” to the opportunity to do this even more and possibly better and more focused over the next two years by taking part in what is called the Vital Congregations Initiative. With other churches in Mission Presbytery we will consider and engage new practices, specifically 7 marks of congregational vitality, which will take us deeper into being the vital community that God is calling us to be. During Year 1, we will gather the information and be equipped with the skills needed to do this. Initially, we will discern the Spirit’s call to action by engaging in a church-wide Bible study. This will begin the second week of February and continue for 7 weeks. Every adult attendee of the church is urged to find a Bible Study group which fits their schedule, if possible. Each week of study will focus on one of the 7 vital marks. Also, the congregation will have the opportunity to participate in an honest assessment of ourselves. This will be done by each member completing a survey, which will be accomplished on some Sunday in the early Fall. A neighborhood assessment will be made as well in order to determine our relevance to the community in which we serve, and a report of our history will be developed. Some of you will want to be involved in both of those. All of this information will be provided to the larger church, the PCUSA offices, and with helpful statistics that they have, a very tailored course of action will be suggested to us. Then we will try to prayerfully carry out the course of action during Year 2, surely by the Spirit’s hand and guidance. We will need do what we have been doing all along, but even more so; that is, allow God’s Spirit to move in our midst and CHANGE us, transform us, do here a new thing, let us be living stones, not just gathered.... but scattered into our neighborhoods, our nation and our world!

*“We are God’s ideas [and] we can be the best of what God made us to be.”* Yes indeed, Grandmother India, that’s who we are...we are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (vs 9) *May the Glory be God’s. Amen.*