

Small Group Faith Fellowship #3

Week of Sunday, October 25, 2015 – Feast of Dedication (Trinity XXI)

Genesis 28:10-end

1 Peter 2:1-10

Background:

Feast of Dedication

The feast of Dedication commemorates the dedication and consecration of this building to the service of God (on May 7th, 1853). But we are not just celebrating brick and mortar! The building dedicated and consecrated to the service of God is itself a sign of the grace of God at work in the community that meets together within it for worship. The building is a sign that we are dedicated and consecrated to the service of God. That's the fundamental idea of the lesson from 1 Peter 2: *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* So on this feast we reflect on who we are (our status, or identity before God), what we do (our ministry and mission as a church) and why we do it (our motivation).

Status and Performance- Two Different Approaches

Questions of status and performance are central to questions of who we are, what we do, and why we are motivated to do it. In the world, status is built on performance (looks, power, money, know-how), and though the drive for status may indeed motivate high performance, the status is inherently insecure and the motivation is fear, guilt, or pride. There is a religious version of this, in which by trying harder to be good, we hope to be accepted by God (sometimes called works-righteousness). The basic principle is the same – status based on performance.

The Christian religion takes exactly the opposite tack. It calls us to repent of status-seeking based on performance, serving the false gods of the world. Instead it offers status as free gift of God to those who believe and trust in Christ and the gospel. As ideas, these two approaches are incompatible; and as facts in history, they are on collision course – and collision is just what happened (and still happens). In today's epistle lesson, St. Peter explores that collision using language and images from the Old Testament (Isaiah 28:10; Ps. 118:22; Isaiah 8:14 – see scripture texts at end of this document.)

Collision

As St. Peter says, in Jesus God has set a "living stone" in the path of the world - "disallowed [rejected] indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious". The "builders" (builders of worldly community) "stumble at the word, being disobedient" says St. Peter - they refuse to believe in Christ, *because* they are disobedient, because it means giving up the false gods they serve. That's why the "living stone" must be rejected, condemned and crucified. But to God this stone is "chosen and precious", and that's why he has vindicated it in resurrection, and as heavenly Architect has made it the chief cornerstone of the spiritual house he is building with us, a community of "living stones" who come to it in faith.

Our Status

As living stones built up as a spiritual house on the cornerstone that is Christ, everything that is true of Christ is true of us also. Because he is "chosen of God and precious", so are we - for in his mercy God regards us with the same love and delight with which he regards his Son. That is our status, that is our

identity - based not on our performance, but on his free gift - and what a status it is - to be loved as God loves his own Son!

Our Mission.

St. Peter applies to the community of believers phrases used in the Old Testament to describe Israel's place in God's plan for history - *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*: which is to say, in believing in Christ and the gospel, we are not only incorporated into the community that God is building - we are also taking our place in the unfolding of his plan for salvation of the world. We are priests offering worship to God, and bearing witness to the world.

In the Old Testament, their status as priests gives them access to God, and their work was to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people they represented. As a *holy priesthood* we have privileged access to God and our mission is *to offer up spiritual sacrifices* for all God's people.

- because Christ has already offered the sacrifice for sins, the sacrifice we offer is, as Hebrews 13:15 says, the "sacrifice of praise" and thanksgiving (Ps. 50) for the redemption he has won for us - "the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name"
- this sacrifice has a material counterpart, in the offering of our substance for the work of the church and relief of those in need, "for" it says in Heb. 13:15 "with such sacrifices God is well pleased" – that's our stewardship
- but the sacrifice is also *us*: in it, as Prayer book puts it, echoing Romans 12:1, "we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee"

All of these elements come together in Lord's Supper, the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the church - but all the church's worship is eucharistic (offering thanks and praise), all of it is sacrificial.

St. Peter says our mission is not only worship, it is also witness: *that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*. To offer praise to God, is also to proclaim his Name to the world, that by our worship and our witness God may gather his people out of every nation. We are indeed "chosen", but not as an in-group, an exclusive club, to keep outsiders at bay: it is election to bear witness among the nations that the Lord is God (cf Isaiah 42:1-9, 43:10).

Motivation

St. Peter says we are God's "peculiar people" - a people peculiar to him, his own special possession, the treasure he delights in - so we don't have any insecurity about our status - we have God's sure word of promise, and he cannot lie. And if we know that, if we truly understand that, if that reality has taken possession of our hearts and minds, then fear, or guilt, or pride are no longer what motivate us, they no longer control us - what motivates us now the hope and love born out of gratitude for his grace - love for the giver of these gifts, a desire to bring him pleasure in all that we do. The key is to let that truth take hold of your heart and mind, to transform your outlook and motivation.

Open:

What did you hear in this Sunday's teaching? What struck you the most?

Was there anything that was new to you, or surprised you?

Was there anything that puzzled you? anything you did not understand?

Did it raise any questions or issues for you?

Dig:

What is the collision between the world and Christ about? Why does this collision happen?

World seeks status through performance; Christ bases performance upon status, which is his free gift of God's grace to those who believe.

What image does St. Peter use to describe this collision and its outcome?

He draws on Isaiah 28:10, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14 to speak of Christ as the "living stone" rejected by men but "elect and precious" to God, who makes it the "chief cornerstone" upon which he builds up believers as "living stones" into a "spiritual house" and a "holy priesthood".

What is its outcome for the world? For Christ? For believers?

The world stumbles (does not believe) because of its disobedience – it serves the false gods of this world, because it thinks they will confer status.

Christ is exalted the chief cornerstone of the spiritual building – the new society or community God is building.

Christians are incorporated into that new society or community, and undertake its mission.

What words does St. Peter use to describe the privileged status of Christians?

- *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood,*
- *ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people [i.e. a people that belongs to God, a people treasured by God]*
- *Unto you which believe there is honor (probably a more correct translation than "unto you therefore which believe he is precious")*
- *which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God:*

- *which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. When we add up those words, we understand ourselves to be part of a community whom God regards with the same love that he gives his own Son, who is “elect (chosen), precious (honored or esteemed)”.*

In what two ways does St. Peter describe their work or mission?

*Offering of spiritual sacrifices – worship
Showing forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light – witness*

How do these two ways relate to each other?

Worship is praise offered to God; witness is proclamation made to the world – but the substance is the same.

How does status we have in Christ shape our motivation for our mission?

Instead of pride, fear, and guilt, we are moved by gratitude, hope, and love

Close:

What part of this Sunday’s teaching do you think needs further exploration?

How might this Sunday’s teaching be applied in your life?

Pray:

Thank God for bringing everyone together in fellowship for the sharing of faith. Thank him for the gift of his Word and Spirit, and ask him for help to know and experience more fully the gift of his grace in your life.

Scriptures

Genesis 28:10-22 *This is none other but the house of God.*

¹⁰ And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; ¹⁴ And thy

seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

¹⁵ And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. ¹⁶ And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. ¹⁸ And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. ²⁰ And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, ²¹ So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: ²² And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

1 Peter 2:1-10 *Built up a Spiritual House, a Holy Priesthood*

2 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ² As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: ³ If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. ⁴ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ⁵ Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture,

Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone,
elect, precious:
and he that believeth on him
shall not be confounded (Isaiah 28:10)

⁷ Unto you therefore which believe he is precious¹: but unto them which be disobedient,
the stone which the builders disallowed,
the same is made the head of the corner (Ps. 118:22),

⁸ And
a stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offence (Isaiah 8:14),

even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. ⁹ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; ¹⁰ Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

¹ This should probably be translated: "Unto you which believe there is honor"