

2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.[a]

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and **5** like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7 This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,”

8 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.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,[d] in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 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.

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Legos - How many of us played with them? I LOVE Legos. They started in Denmark. I remember going to LegoLand in Denmark when I was little. In Danish the word Lego means “Play well.” As I was looking up information about Lego, I found that in Latin it means “I put together” and in Italian it means “I connect.”

Legos come in a variety of sizes and colors and actually now in various shapes too. But something about Lego is that they all fit together. Any Lego, from any set, whether made in the 1950's or last year, Legos fit together.

If you have ever built with them, you know that the way in which you build can make a difference in strength. You have to alternate where the joints are and make sure that you push them together well. However, Legos will snap together with other legos. They are consistent.

We however, are not consistently shaped like Legos. For us to be joined together to make a spiritual house, we, like the early Christian community this letter was written to, must be shaped and formed, so that we fit.

The text reads, like living stones, let yourself be built into a spiritual house because you are a royal priesthood. This community was just getting started. They were all learning more about the Risen Christ. They needed to be shaped and formed and it needed to take place within the context of being outsiders, being shunned and marginalized by the community around them. They were learning to live differently than the societal norms and culture was pushing back.

The early church was persecuted. While there still are parts of the world today where people can face death if they proclaim the Christian faith, we are not those people. The church in America is not being persecuted. But we still need to hear these words written to the early church. We need the reminder of our identity as a royal priesthood and a chosen people.

There are 3 things that I think we need to learn from this letter to an early church community.

1. Community not individual -

Our society is very much about rugged individualism and it is to our detriment. I have heard many of you voice missing the community during the height of the pandemic and I think we have to remember, being Christian is about being in community. The text says “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”

In no way does the early church, nor ourselves laying claim to being a chosen people exclude any other group. This is a text that we must be careful not to use replacement theology. Israel is the chosen people of God. With the early church, the circle is drawn wider and more are brought into the circle. This is the same for us. We do not knock anyone out of being the people of God, nor do we get to be built into a wall that excludes anyone else.

Being shaped and formed takes place in community. We read, learn, grow, pray and that is how we are continually shaped and formed. That is how we are continually molded into the stones that will be flush in the wall of the house. And it is only in community that we are God’s own people. It is only when as a community we welcome the poor, the orphan, and the stranger. It

is only as a community when we share the light of Christ with the world, it is as a community that we find our identity as the spiritual house of God.

2. Jesus is the cornerstone- this is from where our identity comes. If we are indeed being built into a spiritual house, then like any good structure, there is a cornerstone. In architecture, the cornerstone is traditionally the first stone laid. Often we mark the stone with important dates or people as a reminder. A cornerstone marks the geographical location by orienting a building in a specific direction and all other stones laid in reference.

Jesus is the cornerstone by which everything else is set. Jesus is our reference. Being a people who follow the resurrected Christ, the resurrection is our foundational claim. It is the claim upon which all others rest. Our identity is found in new life, in being rebuilt and reborn for a holy purpose.

3. Living into our identity, being shaped is a lifelong process, but first knowing our identity is transformational. When we know whose we are - God's chosen people, and who we are, resurrection people set with Christ as the cornerstone, then we can live with those foundational truths grounding us.

The "Little Rock Nine," nine teens who were to be the first African American students to enter Little Rock's Central High School following the 1954 Brown vs Board of Education ruling by the Supreme Court.

On September 2, 1957 the night prior to what was to be the teens' first day in Central High classrooms, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus ordered the state's National Guard to block their entrance.

Two days later after an order from a federal judge, a mob along with the National Guard kept the 9 black teens out. Just over 2 weeks later the national guard was removed and although the students were escorted into the school, an angry mob rused the school and the teens were sent home fearing for their safety. On September 25th, the students began to attend classes regularly, however they did it with an armed escort.

I heard one of the 9, Elizabeth Ekford speak at a conference I attended in Little Rock. She told of the horrors of that first school year. Of the threats she received. The depth of her pain was evident in the fact that the hotel ballroom was cleared,

swept for explosives or other items, and the audience was given instructions as to how we were to comport ourselves for her safety and well being. Yet, this woman talked for an hour about the experience and shared her faith story.

Another one of the 9, Melba Beals wrote a book entitled “Warriors Don’t Cry” and she speaks about her grandmother’s wisdom. Her Grandma India was strong in her faith and told Melba that “We are God’s ideas and we must strive to be the best of what God made us to be.” Her grandma constantly reminds her that she is a Child of God.

Her grandma was right. We are God’s chosen people. We are God’s children. We are constantly being shaped and formed into the best of what God made us to be. And as we are shaped and formed in community and by community, we are set in place in the spiritual house, lined up with Jesus Christ who is our cornerstone. Just as the letter from Peter to a young Christian community is to help them find their identity to persevere in suffering and to remind them that being shaped is a lifelong process, we too need that reminder.

We belong to God and to each other. We have been shown mercy and grace and as we are built into a spiritual house it is to show forth the presence and power of God and to offer mercy and grace to others just as we ourselves have been recipients of mercy and grace.

So although we are not like Legos that always fit together. We can trust that God is at work, shaping and forming us. Placing us into the spiritual house where Christ is our cornerstone so that we may bring others into the light from the darkness and to live together as God’s people.