

Call to Worship

Jesus promises us that he will empower us, even us, to bring light to the world.

Jesus is reported to have done some spectacularly good works in the Gospels, and yet Jesus promises us that we will do even greater works because of him. **To follow Jesus is to have faith that he empowers us to do his work in the world, to have confidence that Jesus is saving the world through us.**

Prayer of Invocation

For the love we share as a fellowship of faith, called in your name, inspired by your word, created as you willed, we give you thanks and praise. May we express our gratitude not only in words but by widening our circle to include more, that all may come to believe in you. All honor and glory be yours, now and forever. Amen.

The Word

1 Peter 2:2-10 Common English Bible

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, **so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

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 saying]: "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.

Living the Word

Often when I choose a scripture to preach on, you all graciously read it responsively with whomever is worship leader for the morning. The scriptures you just shared needs some unpacking as you should be wondering what this month's theme topic of hospitality could possibly connect with baby's milk, living stones, which then become spiritual temples and then royal priests/priestesses. It sounds like part of a movie about a lost culture recently discovered; and it might be.

So lets walk through this scripture a little slower to find the hidden gems. 1 Peter 2:2-10: "*Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, since you have tasted that the Lord is good.*" Like Jesus, Peter is using down-home examples that the people of his day would understand, but are also timeless even today.

As they or you would give a newborn the best nourishment that was available to grow, we need the best understandings of God to know that God wants only good for us and so has sent the representative available, Jesus, to coach us into knowledge and understanding of who God wants to be for us so we can become part of that goodness for others.

Verse four, *"Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective it is chosen, valuable."* When I was a kid we used to get excited whenever we found an agate. They were so beautiful to look at and fairly plentiful in the valley where I lived west of River Falls, WI, just 2 miles from the St. Croix Riverway. My friend's uncle had a rock tumbler and if I wasn't amazed already, after they were tumbled they were even more beautiful.

I have always wondered about the layers, that are so interesting. I looked them up on Wikipedia: *The Lake Superior agate is a type of agate stained by iron and found on the shores of Lake Superior. Its wide distribution and iron-rich bands of color reflect the gemstone's geologic history in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.*

This color gate reflects many aspects of the area. It was formed during lava eruptions that occurred in these northern states about a billion years ago. The stone's predominant red color comes from iron, a major industrial mineral found extensively throughout the Iron Range region. Finally, the Lake Superior agate can be found in many regions of this area as it was distributed by glacial movement 10,000 to 15,000 years ago.

It is always interesting to me when bits of knowledge come together. Also as a child, my grandfather once told me that the valley we lived in had some of the richest soil in the whole U.S.A. I questioned it until I was in college and learned that our valley was where the glaciers dropped much of the silt loam, black and excellent for muddy puddles and growing just about anything well. All of this to say that those agates that were easy to find as a child are valuable to people who didn't come from around here.

Verse five: *"You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* Like those agates we have been placed here to be more than just a rock on the path.

We are each valuable to God and each one given valuable layers to experiences bringing us closer to God. In addition we can all use some polishing in our lives to make us extraordinary. From dull rocks with potential into a holy priesthood. That is honestly impressive...

To be called a holy priesthood today would be the same as saying "You are part of a group who claim to be God followers, called Christians. Verse six: *"Thus it is written in scripture, Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed."* We live and act certain ways because of that understanding of who we are. We come together and worship here because what we find here speaks to who we are. Then we go out and live in the world according to who God has called us to be.

We are living examples to everyone that we come in contact with. We become a witness to what we believe, and when we can be our authentic self, as God created us to be it is a positive witness to others. As our better self we become a living stone, a polished agate, of great value.

Verse seven: *"So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed."*

There are a lot who stumble. Somehow they miss the part that God is good and wants the best for us. Our lives can be easier if we can follow our Creator. We stumble as well sometimes. We forget to hang together, stay focused on the path before us. God continues to love us all, unconditionally; that is grace!

Last verses: *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* There you have it God is pointing us to hospitality, reaching others with the good news of God's love and grace.

You may be a hidden gem with the potential to help this church grow, just by being who God has called you to be. You may be not ready or afraid to find out. You may be thinking that doing hospitality means changing yourself or changing others.

Henry Nouwen in his book Reaching Out says this: *"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."*

So we just have to invite people into our lives, and give them space to be themselves authentic. God is already working their lives, as well as yours. That is how we can look back and see clearer the directions we have come, when we stumbled and when we were moving forward. Those are the gems long hidden until the right time.

"This Woman Wore Her Engagement Ring For A Year Without Even Knowing It" Front page news yesterday. She wore it around her neck and it was special because he had made it for her. For their second anniversary they visited Spoo Park, a place they had talked about for a while. There he asked to see her necklace to and proceeded to pry it open. Inside in a carved out niche was a diamond ring and he proposed on the spot.

After recovering from the surprise that she had been in possession of it for a year and didn't even know it, she said yes. As an added twist to the story – the word 'spoo' means hidden place. This woman had carried a diamond ring around her neck for a year. What hidden gems is the Holy Spirit growing within your spirit?

I am trying to give you some practical hospitality tips in all of the communications that I share as we prepare this month for the summer guest that may come. Here are the top ten best practices of hospitality:

10. Remember names. If you don't just ask "Can you help me with your name."
9. Escort them to wherever they need to go. Walmart employees do this if you ask where something is.
8. Do a hand-off. All you football fans get this. Try to find someone who might connect through a hobby or former location or something that you think they might have in common.
7. Hospitality begins in the parking lot. Save them a space, even if you don't know who 'they' are yet. On a nice day, you don't have to wait to get inside to greet them.
6. Parking Attendants. We may not be ready for this step, yet, but without an awning over the entrance – an umbrella on a rainy morning might be nice.
5. Post upcoming events throughout the building. Where are the places that people pause for a moment and might see an eye level, easy to read, promotion?
4. First time guests are looking for a place that looks safe, clean and professional.
3. Practice 'pre-emptive hospitality.' Keep checking and asking if they look like they are lost or searching for something.
2. Love the people...interact with them.
1. Smile!

Last week I said we have to do this - every person, every Sunday. It is the 'job' of everyone, but the good news is, we are in this together and it should be fun, not painful... There is a poem "This is My Church" on the front of the bulletin. Would you read it with me?

This is my church. It is composed of people just like me.

It will be friendly if I am friendly.

It will do a great work if I work.

It will make generous gifts if I am generous.

It will bring others into its fellowship if I bring them.

Its seats will be filled if I fill them.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service

If I, who make it what it is, am filled with these.

Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the task of being

All these things I want my church to be.

Yes, Were the church together!