

# God's People

1 Peter 2:2-10

In the past week I spent time with a Detroit family that I have known since 1979. I met them when I joined United Christian Church and quickly I learned that members of the family were founding members of that congregation. These families intermarried, so there are sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins that made up the huge extended family over the 80 years of the life of the congregation. Over the years, I have spoken to some of the family historians to piece together the puzzle.

I was with many of the family as they celebrated the ordination of one member, Rev. Vickie Wright on last Sunday. I knew how to connect the dots of the immediate family: mother, step father, brothers and son. However there were some sitting on the first and second rows whose connections I was not sure of. I just didn't understand. Then this past Friday I attended a funeral where many of these same people were present – sitting in a slightly different order, but in the family seats. As I observed I began to understand some of these family connections. There were first cousins that I had not realized their relationships, uncles and aunts whose positions I had not understood. What I was then able to see was that they were members of one extended family, rather than seeing them as individuals. They were a family; one people with common histories, ancestry. It is the same with the church, one family, God's people.

Peter told the new Christians to whom he wrote that they were God's people – members of the same family. As God's people, we have experiences in common; common preferences. God's people long for the

pure, spiritual milk. God's people grow into salvation. God's people have tasted that the Lord is good. God's people are like living stones. God's people are being built into a spiritual house. God's people are a holy priesthood. God's people offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. God's people have put their trust in Jesus and will not be put to shame. God's people believe in Jesus. Jesus is precious to God's people. For God's people Jesus is the corner stone of their lives. God's people are a chosen race. God's people are a royal priesthood. God's people are a holy nation. God's people proclaim the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. We are God's people.

Today is four Sundays after Easter and Mother's Day, and the last bloom from the lily has dropped. Alleluia will soon be tucked away for next year, and we are looking forward to Pentecost and then the Ordinary Time, when we learn the lessons of the Old and New Testaments for living life faithfully in the regular challenges of life. What better day to call for a refresher course about the impact of Easter Sunday for God's people; though every Sunday is supposed to be a little Easter. All the Easter gladness we can collect must carry us across that long trek and sustain us, fully convicted by the power of the resurrection for the people of God.

It is a pep talk of sorts that Peter gives in our scripture. Pulling out all the Hebrew Scripture stops, he connects past and present, our ancestry to our present life as God's people. "O taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8) becomes the condition for salvation: "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (v. 3). The living stones of Isaiah 28 predict the cornerstone that the new Christians believe has become Christ. The pitiful rejection of

Hosea's children becomes the reversal of fortune for those who follow Christ (v. 10)! Peter was teaching these new Christians that they were in a long line of God's people – in the same way that God fed and guided and made Israel into God's people, God, through Jesus, had made them and us into God's people.

Not everyone is excited by learning the history of their family. For most of us Peter's references lie flat. Even if we are well versed in the scriptural connections or genealogy, what happened in the past is past. What concerns most Christians is carving out a meaningful role for Christian identity today. Not entirely unlike the predicament of 1 Peter's readers, Christianity today has become an increasingly alienating pursuit. Can we claim to be Christian, but not one of *those* Christians? Can we claim to be a follower of Christ, without conjuring up the online jokes and stereotypes plaguing anyone remotely associated with organized religion? What kinds of resources are given to believers today so that we can withstand the onslaught of cultural disdain for Christianity and being identified as God's people? How can longing for spiritual milk, living stones, and the designation of royal priesthoods be any help in understanding that we are God's people?

Today is also Mother's Day. There is always some trial and error when a new mother learns to feed her newborn. If the mom is breastfeeding she has to be relaxed enough for the milk to flow. A mom has to be attentive enough to help the baby latch on. A mom has to have taken care of herself with food and drink enough to produce the milk. On the baby's side, some learning has to happen as well. The baby has a natural inclination to search for the breast. Babies still need help to find the right place, suck hard enough for the milk to let down, and not wear themselves out in the effort. In the first week of life, mother and child have to work together to find a rhythm that will make

this work. The miracle is that both mother and child "know" at some deep level how to do this. Their DNA has been hardwired for sustaining life. Likewise, a new Christian "knows" at some deep level that "spiritual milk" is what will nurture their life of faith. To be sustained for the risks and challenges of a long life of faith, we start as a newborn starts, with raw material of Jesus' teachings, the good milk that is especially designed to meet our most basic needs.

These basic needs give way to building blocks, living stones that lay a foundation for the challenges sure to follow. Then a solid foundation gives way to an identity that will not shrivel up at the first sign of trouble. We are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people* (v. 9).

As God's own people we live in the real world which is in real peril. As God's people we are called to proclaim something of what we know about God to the world. That is no small call. To do this takes the weight of a person who has, according to 1 Peter, been warmly nurtured in the faith, who has the strength of one whose spiritual house rests on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, and whose identity is strong and secure in the arms of God who serves up spiritual milk like no other.

As God's people, we are five Sundays into Easter, the power of the resurrection is clear. The genius of God's actions on Easter Sunday is that there is death to counter every day, not just at Easter. There are oppressive structures to overturn every day, not just at Easter. There is life to be celebrated every day, not just at Easter. First Peter insists that the Christian life particularly equips us with all we need to proclaim the mighty acts of the one who calls us out of darkness into the light. For today, our role is clear and we are compelled to act. As God's own people we are empowered through Christ to worship, sing, dance, pray, serve, protest, and march. No

stereotype can define us, because we have been claimed by God. No ridicule can undo us, because we have been named by God. No shallow expression of faith can represent us.

We are God's people and long for the pure, spiritual milk. We are God's people growing into salvation. We are God's people, we have tasted that the Lord is good. We are God's people and are living stones. We are God's people and are being built into a spiritual house. We are God's people, a holy priesthood. We are God's people believing in Jesus. We are God's people offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We are God's people, having put our trust in Jesus and we will not be put to shame. We are God's people and Jesus is precious to us. We are God's people and Jesus is the corner stone of our lives. We are God's people, a chosen race. We are God's people, a royal priesthood. We are God's people, a holy nation. We are God's people who proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. We are God's people.

We are God's people and know Christ is risen! Risen indeed. This is enough to sustain us. It is enough to support us. It is enough to empower us for the days ahead. Alleluia! Amen. **Joy Douglas Strome**

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