

May 29, 2022
Chosen By God.....
1 Peter 2:4-10 (NRSV)

(Brief introduction of self, and husband Rob – from Sonora to Japantown, glad to feel so welcomed as part of this spiritual family, honored that Pastor Morgan asked me to preach this morning.)

1. Take a look at the picture in the bulletin, [SLIDE] of the acrobats. Does that look like a temple to you?

A. What is a temple supposed to look like?

B. What was a temple supposed to look like to the people of Asia Minor of 2000 years ago?

a. Anyone living in the area would know that! Giant, huge white marble blocks, carved marble columns, beautiful statues of the god or goddess to whom the temple was dedicated. You can still see the ruins of those Greco-roman temples today.

b. And, any Jewish people living in the area would feel especially strongly about what a Temple should look like. The Temple in Jerusalem was still standing at the time that Peter wrote his letter (though it wouldn't be for much longer.) The Temple Mount, the perfectly fitted giant marble blocks, the gold leaf: the Temple was the very best that humans could build at that time.

C. Peter was writing to small groups of Christians scattered throughout the area we now know as Turkey. They knew what temples were supposed to look like; and what they had sure wasn't that! They met and worshiped in homes; and they caught a fair amount of grief – even suffering - from family members, neighbors, and local officials.

D. I could imagine these folks in the small house churches getting a bit discouraged, can't you? They're not big; they're not wealthy; they don't have a beautiful stone building; they don't have social status. What have they got?

2. Fortunately, size has nothing to do with it. Nor does wealth, nor marble, nor social status. What they have, is Jesus. [SHOW SLIDE – Size has nothing to do with it; Jesus has everything to do with it.]

A. Peter is strengthening them here by reminding them of who they truly are: they are the people who have been built into Jesus, and his life has become their lives. His strength has become their strength. Sort of like how that acrobat in the picture is supporting another acrobat- his strength becomes hers.

B. Peter uses the analogy of a cornerstone of a big marble temple, which they'd all seen every day. He says that Jesus is a living stone, chosen and precious in God's sight. And specifically, Jesus is a living cornerstone, into which the whole of a living temple is built, and upon which the walls are supported.

C. And they are like the other stones allowing themselves to be built into the cornerstone.

D. And since Jesus is the LIVING stone, his life flows into them and through them, as they are built into him. They become part of the human structure that is the church – with Jesus' life building them up and building them together. Kind of like a human pyramid anchored in Jesus.

E. Through Jesus, they are themselves the Temple. They don't need a temple building. They are a temple.

F. Peter says, vv 4 and 5, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 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." What a privilege, right?

3. Likewise, maybe we too can get a bit discouraged at times.

A. We do have a dedicated building- which looks great, BTW.

B. But our spiritual house is a bit on the small side. The human structure that has been built into Jesus here in West Valley is not as large now as it once was.

C. Peter's letter describes an ongoing process of being built into a spiritual house. But it's hard. At least in Japantown, where Rob and I live, churchgoing isn't really a thing. How about in your neighborhoods? It's plain harder to share Jesus' life with others than it used to be, for a lot of different reasons.

C. So we could use some encouragement! Agreed? Perhaps we too need to be reminded of who we truly are in Christ!

D. And fortunately for us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God's words through Peter to small churches in Asia Minor can also be God's words through Peter to small churches in California.

4. All right then. What does God say to this spiritual house, to this holy priesthood, as we gather to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ? [SHOW SLIDE – WHO ARE WE? GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE!]

A. **First of all: God reminds us whose we are.** 1 Peter 2:9, NRSV: "But you are a chosen race" (NIV, "You are a chosen people".) A royal priesthood. A holy nation. God's own people." That's who we are as Christians. We are not our own. We are God's. God created us and chose us and built us together into this human structure.

B. Think for a minute. God chose YOU. The God who created the trillions of stars and quadrillions of planets also created you, and chose you. The God who created the whole universe and its infinite variety of creatures out of nothing, also chose you.

C. And you. And you. And you. God chose each one of us! To be part of his people! What an honor! What if the President of the United States chose us as examples of good citizenship? Wouldn't we be honored? Then how much more are we honored to be chosen by the Almighty and infinite God to be his people!

D. And not only are we chosen to be his people. We are chosen to be his priests- chosen to be intercessors, go-betweens. We are chosen to be part of his holy nation. We are God's own. We belong to him. We are built into Jesus himself. And through Jesus, we are also built into one another. His life is our life.

5. [SHOW SLIDE – WHAT ARE WE TO DO?] **Second of all: God's choosing has consequences.**

Why are we chosen as God's own people? Was it just random? No; we are chosen because we have a job to do.

A. 1 Pet 2:9 continues, "in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

B. We aren't just chosen randomly. We are chosen for a reason.

C. God chose us so that we can proclaim the mighty acts of our Savior Jesus, who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

D. And how do we do that? We just got done agreeing that it's a lot harder to share Jesus' life with others than it used to be. Right?

E. Well, let's think about the whole of verse 9 for a minute. Peter says we are a royal priesthood. OK. What does a priest do? In Peter's day, a priest would have offered sacrificed animals to God, to atone for what people had done; and, he would also offer God's instruction and forgiveness to the people. In other words, a priest was sort of a two-way communications channel. He was also the head Quality Control guy, who ensured that the people respected God's holiness. "You shall be holy because I the Lord am holy."

F. So, for example, suppose we are feeling terrible about the 19 children and two adults killed in Uvalde, Texas. We could say to ourselves, "Wow, this is really depressing," and read about something else to cheer ourselves up. Or we could take our jobs as priests seriously.

a. We could prepare yourself to come into God's presence, and then

b. We could offer up your sincere prayers for the families and friends and co-workers and classmates of those who were killed. We could offer up your sincere prayers for those who were injured, and for the medical teams caring for them.

c. And, since priests are sort of two-way communicators, we could also ask God which Scripture verses apply here. We could use those verses in polite postings on social media. We could send polite emails to our representatives and senators.

d. In doing these things, we would, by our prayers, our words, and our actions, proclaiming the mighty acts of the One who called us out of darkness.

G. Or as another example, suppose we have a friend who is making some poor decisions. As a royal priest, what do we do about it? Do we just say, "Oh, well, it's not my business?" No, we don't. We are chosen by God, and we have a job to do. We are chosen IN ORDER TO proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

a. And so we'd prepare ourselves to come into God's presence.

b. We'd pray about our friend, and ask for guidance and direction. We'd ask God about Scripture that might apply.

c. If, after praying and listening, we felt led to do so, we would talk gently to the friend. We would do our best to listen to them, as we listen to God, and try to make a connection between them. That could be another way that we proclaim the mighty acts of the One who called us out of darkness.

H. Proclaiming the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, may not be easy to do. But it is our calling; and if we do not speak to a world that is in desperate need of Jesus, then who will?

6. We have choices to make as a congregation, as well as individual choices; and the choices that we have before us require a lot of prayer and discernment.

A. As we pray about our choices as a congregation, I would ask us to remember Peter's words. We have been built together into Christ, and his life becomes our life, binding us together into a spiritual house. God, in his infinite power and mercy, has chosen us. We are part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

B. And, as we pray, let's remember that we still have a job to do – just as much now as we did 40 years ago: to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. God has never told us to stop doing that, has he? So we are to keep on proclaiming, in whatever way is loving and appropriate in this place at this time; and we are to ask God for direction on the particulars.

C. And remember: 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. Remember that. Remember and pray. Amen.