

May 10, 2020

"Simon Says: Be Built Up"

1 Peter 2:4-12

As we walked with Simon Peter through the weeks leading up to Easter and beyond – through all those ups and downs, successes and failures, moments of clarity and confusion – we witnessed the difference a resurrected Jesus made in his life. We saw him go from hopeless to hopeful; to someone who embodied a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3) is how he put it in this letter of his we are looking at together. Essentially, we've gone from his Life to his Letter; from what he did – with and for Jesus – to what **Simon Said** under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Let's listen to more of what Simon Said:

[Read 1 Peter 2:4-10]

Identity makes all the difference. How we **see** ourselves impacts everything: what we attempt to do and choose to avoid; how we process/think about information and interactions; what we think about the future; how we listen, talk to and respond to God, others . . . and even ourselves. Our sense of identity affects everything.

Although much of our identity is formed at an early age, God is more than capable of helping us see and understand ourselves anew through His lens; to see ourselves as we truly are and as we can become in Christ. We saw Peter change the way he saw himself when Jesus gave him a new name and identity: "You are Peter (petros/a), the Rock . . . and upon you I will build My church." (Matthew 16:18) Jesus also told Peter that he may have been a fisherman by trade, but now he would be a "catcher/fisher of people." (Luke 5:10) This was the beginning of a long journey of seeing himself differently and understanding his new purpose in life . . . of learning how to live into his God-given identity.

So how do you see yourself? And how have you seen yourself in the past?

There are numerous ways we come to see ourselves and/or are labeled by others.

General Labels: Failure, Sweet-Talker, Over Comer, Pleaser, Victim, "Not Good Enough," Competent/Incompetent, Successful, No-Good, Responsible One, Peace Maker

Label based on job/role: boss, teacher, therapist, doctor, mechanic, chef, musician, MOTHER

Labels that focus on our personality/wiring:

Type-A, Myers Briggs, Strengthsfinder, Enneagram 1 wing 9, Spiritual Gifts

All of these labels provide various avenues for understanding who we are; some of them are helpful and some are very harmful. When I took an extension to Strengthfinder (called Stand Out) I learned that my primary motif was "Connector." I love to connect: people to people; people to resources; churches to each other or other ministries/organizations; individuals to a "ministry that fits," donors to worthwhile causes. This has been such a helpful way to understand who God has created me to be. A less helpful (but true) label is "Incompetent with anything mechanical."

The scriptures (Old and New Testaments) tell us who we are in a way that goes beyond our profession, age, gender, family script, accomplishments, personality, failures, and just about any category imaginable. The Bible tells us that, in Christ, we are children of God; beloved sons and daughters of the Most High God; men and women, boys and girls created in the image of God; people whom God delights in.

How we see ourselves makes all the difference, but WHO we listen to about who we are is the tricky part. We must constantly shed the identities that have been foisted upon us – even by well-meaning people – and listen to that (often) Still, Small Voice that says we are His beloved sons and daughters.

Let's broaden the conversation and ask another question about identity. **How do we see ourselves communally – as The Church? God's People?**

The great danger we face in the West is that we see almost everything through a highly individualistic lens. This makes it more difficult for us to be The Church . . . but easier to market as consumers: What would YOU (second person, singular) like right now? How can I help make YOUR life easier, more pleasant, more fulfilling? We have something just for YOU. A lot of us, for a long time, have been hearing one version or another of: "Have it YOUR way!" and "YOU deserve a break today!" In fact, **CONSUMER** may be the most frequent identity label put on all of us – whether we're aware of it or not. [I'm a little concerned that everyone is getting so used to online services that they'll never want to go back. It's perfect for ME!]

So how do we, or how can/might we see ourselves communally – as The Church/God's People?

What is our foundational reality? How do we fit together?

And where is Jesus in all this?

This is where we see the **Power of Metaphor**. You'll remember that we recently re-stated our mission – partly because it had been almost 15 years since FPC had undertaken the exercise of addressing the issue of congregational identity, but even more so because metaphor is more powerful than abstract language. Thus, Jesus says: "Simon, you are a Rock and Fisher of Men

and Women" instead of 'You will be a leader that both nurtures believers in their faith development and reaches out evangelistically to those who don't yet know the grace and mercy of the Father.' Rock . . . Fisher of People. That's who you are, Peter!

I think that's why Peter says what he says in this letter. Simon Says we are like "**Living Stones** [who are allowing God to build us] into a spiritual house" with "**Christ Jesus as the Cornerstone.**" (1 Peter 2:5-6). "Rock" was such a helpful metaphor for Peter. So, naturally, he uses the same metaphor to help followers of Jesus understand who they are – AND, more importantly, who Jesus is. And he pulls in Old Testament scriptures that use the same metaphor (Isaiah 8, 28 and Psalms 118 – which Jesus Himself used to refer to Himself as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke).

Did you notice Peter doesn't call himself the foundation or cornerstone? Even though Jesus said He would "build His Church" (Matthew 16:18) on Peter – the Rock, Peter had to learn the hard way he wasn't as solid as he thought, and couldn't be counted on to be the centering and stabilizing force for the Church. Peter never forgot that though Jesus had called him a Rock (in a positive way), he also said, "Get behind Me, Satan, you are a stumbling block (scandalon in Greek)." Peter knew by now, that only Jesus was and could be the Cornerstone; the Chief Cornerstone. Only Jesus could miraculously join Jews and Gentiles, men and women, employees and bosses, rich and poor; and then sustain them as one people/entity/building. Peter knew some would reject Jesus as this Cornerstone, as we know some will today. But to those who believe? To them, Jesus is a "**Precious Stone.**" (1 Peter 2:7)

And we get to be little stones ("living stones") who are connected to Him and connected to each other; people who are "being built up" to be a place where people hear about the grace and forgiveness of God. And we're not even tied to a building to carry out this mission. In fact, telling people about the forgiveness of sin and the grace of God is something we get to do OUTSIDE the building. [We've been learning how to be The Church without a building.]

Peter goes on and just pours on who they are; reminds them of their identity. Simon Says:

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (1 Peter 2:9a) Here again, we see endless connections to the Old Testament.

We don't have time to go into the richness of all Peter's declarations of who we are, but I do want to look at just one of them: **Royal Priesthood**. The word royal reminds us that our identity is given to us – literally inherited; not earned. You don't work your way up to royal status. You're born into royalty and, as Prince Harry has been learning the hard way, you can never really 'get out of it.' We have inherited our status as sons and daughters of the Living God because the One and Only Royal Son of God adopted us into His family. And we're part of a priesthood; that is

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we offer grace and forgiveness to people in the name of Jesus – the pure and spotless Lamb of God who was the perfect sacrifice and allowed His blood to be poured out for the remission of sin. And we get to tell people about what Jesus makes available to everyone. We are royal priests . . . a chosen people . . . a holy nation . . . God's [very] own people.

Peter immediately follows these amazing labels with a purpose statement. Our God-given identity comes with a responsibility: **"that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."** (1 Peter 2:9b) We DO have a job; a role to play. Our identity comes with a purpose.

But just so we don't move too quickly into the practical things we are called to do, Peter dives back into who we are; our identity: **"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."** (1 Peter 2:10) We need to keep coming back to WHO we are before we get too busy and too practical doing what God calls us to do.

After spending all this time on our identity, Peter brings us back to the practical business of holiness without using the actual word. He urges us to live distinct lives as "aliens and strangers;" to "abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul;" and to "conduct ourselves honorably" (1 Peter 2:11) SO THAT even though people reject us, they won't be able to help but see and acknowledge the glory of God.

Knowing who we are is a good start. Do you know who are you?

Knowing who God is? That's the very best place to start. Who else is full of holiness and mercy? Who else knows the real us?

The real us is not the one we try and prop up ourselves. Nor is it the person those who tear us down try to tell us we are. YOU and ME? WE are "living stones." Let's be alive together, in the midst of all that seems to be crumbling around us. And let's stay connected – TOGETHER – to Jesus, our Chief Cornerstone. May we be built up around Him.