

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

4Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5like 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. 6For 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." 7To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," 8and "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. 9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Once you lived in a world of darkness - a watery world without light in which sounds traveled through the fluid to strike your eardrum. You received life then - through an artery flowed nourishment, oxygen, all the compounds and chemicals a body produces or a mother consumes. Life demanded no choices then – all was received.

Then in a moment of time you were born - sound came forth from you for the first time, light entered your eyes, you experienced the temperature of a world that was not part of you. You were a distinct person, you were an individual, you were alone.

A mother takes a child to her breast and a new relationship is begun. In a mother's arms a newborn learns trust, what it is to be nourished and cherished. At her mother's breast, in his father's embrace, a newborn learns belonging. For all of life in family and community and nation the child grown into adult will be learning what it is to belong.

Our second lesson today begins with this image: **Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

Like newborn infants. For many Christians there is a moment of time that is like birth. Before that moment life came to you without much thought, without choosing. Things just were the way they were. Looking

back you might think of it as a time of darkness. But then came a moment of light – the light of the love of Christ. And a time of hearing his voice. And a whole new world opened up.

You are alive, you are free, there are no boundaries for you in the love of God. Death never will own you, life always awaits you in Christ.

Will you ever tire of this milk, this sweet word of grace, feeding you, nourishing you? I know I can never get enough of hearing Jesus' love for me. I trust the same is true of you.

Peter does not stop with this image, though, as if the whole Christian life is drinking of the word of grace. He shifts the image, listen: **Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by morals 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.**

Just as the newborn will learn what it is to be connected in family so Peter speaks of the Christian becoming connected. Christ a living stone, you a living stone, me a living stone all joined together into a spiritual house. God is the builder of the house, you and I and Christ are joined together to form the walls. Together.

All the rest of the images in our second lesson today are about us being joined together. Listen: **You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Not a chosen individual but a chosen race. Not a royal priest but a royal priesthood, not a holy person but a holy nation, not God's person but God's own people. That is who you are, we are.

This way of thinking is so very foreign to us. These days we think of ourselves as individuals, not as part of a people. Like newborns Americans are thinking only of me. What will I get out of this? What should I do? How can I be saved? I, I, I. Or possibly my family, my good friends. But we are not thinking of the group. To do something, give something, commit to something for the sake of others is foreign.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not put himself but others in the center. He put you in the center, living and dying not for himself and his own advantage but for you and your advantage. His sacrifice gives your birth, new life. But once you are joined to him, become a part of him he wants to build you into his own work, teach you to live in his family.

What might you expect in this community of faith? That you would grow in being like Christ. One moment you were the stranger being welcomed, the next you are the welcoming one. One moment you are the one asking for prayers, forgiveness: The next moment you are the one praying for another, forgiving. One moment another steps aside to make way for you, the next moment you are the one who graciously steps aside to make way for another. Not my God and I but we united in Christ's body, we a house of living stones, a temple of God.

Where am I going with all of this? Every day I encounter situations in the church where I want to cry out: Stop being so selfish. Think about someone other than yourself, think about the community, think about the people outside these walls, think about someone other than you and your own. Learn to share. Learn to think about what your neighbor needs and wants and hopes for. Learn to see things from the perspective of a stranger or a young single mother with her hands full or from the perspective of a newcomer to the faith. If you are new here think about what it is like for the ones who have invested so much in the life of this congregation. If you are a teenager, learn to see things from the perspective of a person in a nursing home. If you are an empty nester, ask what help could I give to this young parent. If you are a young parent ask what blessing your family could bring to a lonely widow. If you are the parent of a teenager, ask how you could do something to help some one else's children be the center of attention. Be like Christ, love one another – give yourselves for others.

For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.