

Easter 5- Year A- 1 Peter 2:2-10
(May 21-22, 2011)- Intern Travis Wilson

We're still here! You all are still walking into this sanctuary to sit down in your pews and I am still walking around and talking. There are still cars bustling by us on the road, the phones are still ringing. I am referring to the rapture that was supposed to happen, today, May 21, 2011. This is supposed to be the day that Jesus comes back to earth to take people with him off into heaven. According to some Christians, this is the day that the Bible talks about, the day when we fly off into heaven to be with God. That is, of course, unless you are left behind. I'm still here, so I must be left behind. I must not be good enough to make the cut for Jesus to come back and get me.

Today, I think that I am more jealous than concerned about being left behind. I am jealous of my colleagues at Trinity Lutheran and Bexley Hall Episcopal seminaries because today is their graduation day. How many people get to say that they've graduated on rapture day? And were some of them taken up, or were they all left behind? It paints a funny picture looking at the stage and seeing someone get a diploma and then just vanishing. Frankly, it is something that I would expect in a science fiction movie, not real life. This day reminds me of New Year's Eve in 1999 when we were all scared about Y2K and what that would mean- would our computer work in the morning, would our DVD player explode, would the world somehow just shut down? The next morning came, and like now, I woke up and everything was fine. Things still worked, the news was still on television, and my friends were still around. I don't place much stock in what these Christians were talking about today. The rapture is not particularly biblical and the entirety of the Bible seems to suggest that focusing on who gets into heaven or what happens when you die is not what Jesus had in mind.

It would be easy for us, for me, to want to say nani nani boo boo to those people who predicted the rapture today. It would be easy for me to say surely I'm not like them, I didn't fall into the trap, I must have done it the right way. I'm a Christian all right, but I'm not like one of *those* Christians. However, today really isn't a day for judgment, it isn't a day to gloat that we have it right and they're wrong. No, today is a day to let ourselves return to the basics of our faith, a day to be refreshed, and a day to keep on finding our way in this world.

Getting back to the basics, refreshing one's self, and finding one's way in the world is exactly what is happening throughout this Easter season in the lives of the early disciples. The author of 1 Peter tells his community that they are to "live 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." We've made note for the last several weeks that the folks Peter is talking to are exiles, people who live outside the dominant culture of the Jews and the Romans. These are people who know the meaning of the term outcast: they know what it is to be lost and to not know the way. Some of these people are perhaps former Romans who have been baptized and are seeking to live into their calling as Christians. Peter urges them to get back to the basics, to be refreshed in the spiritual milk they have been fed with. The call for nourishment is a call to remember their baptisms, and to remember the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus healed the sick, mended the broken, gave hope to the hopeless, and life to the dead. This is what their baptisms call them to remember, and it calls them to confess along with the Psalmist that they have tasted the goodness of the Lord.

Since they have been fed and nourished and continue to be so, they are able to come as living stones that are built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood based on the chief cornerstone, Jesus.

This is communal formation, these new Christians are being

formed into a community that is to be set apart, to be holy. This community is to be a very different one than the communities of the Romans. This community is founded on Jesus, the living stone who was rejected by the builders. Jesus is the stone that didn't look right- it was jagged, worn, had rough corners that required too much work to be done. It was much easier for the builders to reject this stone and to get a new one, one that would fit quite nicely with the others. Jesus, then, becomes the rejected one, an alien, and an outcast, thrown to the side and discarded.

The people of 1 Peter live in a world that is remarkably similar to ours. We live in a world of peril, danger, and fear. We live in a world of economic uncertainty- will we be able to afford gas this week? Will we earn enough money to make ends meet for our families? Will we be fired from our job this week, and will we be able to find another one? Will we still be able to provide sound educational opportunities for our students in the wake of budget cuts? We live in a dangerous world. There are places in this world that are marked by violence and destruction. Our community suffers from shootings and terror in the streets. Our nation struggles with relationships on a global scale and the threat of being seen as an enemy instead of an ally. Our world suffers from dangerous storms that keep rocking huge waves against coastlines, dumping lava on villages, wreaking havoc on people's lives, destroying homes and businesses, and these storms keep the rebuilding process from flowing smoothly.

We are afraid for our national security. We are afraid of the violence that could come back to haunt us like the events of September 11. We are scared that life is passing us by way too fast and we don't know how to keep up. We are afraid that the mistakes we've made in life will never be forgiven and that we cannot change the outcome.

These things are a part of the dominant world that we live in.

We stand in that world often feeling like outsiders looking in on something that is so difficult to understand, much less to change. Yet, we, like the people of 1 Peter, have been nourished and strengthened through the resurrection of Jesus. God has chosen us and we place our trust in the rejected stone that has become the very head of the corner. This very stone that is rejected becomes prized and is the foundation of our life of faith. We are a community of living stones, and we come in all shapes and sizes. As living stones, we are people who are young, old, students, graduates, leaders, parents, siblings, people with disabilities, and people with many abilities, people who struggle with illnesses, and people who admittedly don't have it all figured out. We are living stones who are not what the world says we should be- we should be free of worry, pain, anxiety and people for whom all things are possible.

1 Peter tells us that we are built into a spiritual house, a community of faith that stands on the promise that we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” We, like the people of 1 Peter, are people who society says are nothing have now become something. We who were not a people have now become God’s people. We who did not receive mercy have now received mercy. We are people who have been fed and nourished by Jesus and who are formed into a community and given a wonderful identity. We are God’s people, and as God’s people we can withstand anything. As people of God, we are no longer exiles who stand alone, scared, and uncertain amidst the dominant culture. We are living stones, precious in our own right, who are gifted with the strength and courage to live meaningful lives in this world.

We are still here! The world has not ended, the rapture has not occurred. To that I say Alleluia! There is still too much work left to be done here. We have been fed and nourished, gathered into community, given a new identity all for the sake of being

God's own people who proclaim and bear witness to the mighty acts of Jesus who has called us out of darkness and into the marvelous light. We are all tasked to be priests in the world, not I or Pastor Bill, but all of us are called, 1 Peter says, to proclaim the gospel. Our world needs to know the gospel; the good news that Jesus lives and that means the world looks different. We don't have to operate out of fear; we don't need to let violence win the day. The word that we are to proclaim is that God's world is different; God's world is about love for all things. God's world proclaims there is new life among the violence, there is forgiveness and reconciliation among people and nations, and there is abundant richness in the face of seemingly endless decline.

We are called today to proclaim the truth, and we are equipped to do so. Go from this place into the world proclaiming the message that God is about love, not disaster. Tell the world that the One who is rejected becomes the way and the life. Tell them about the ministry of Jesus, tell them about his death, and how he was raised and how that means that in the end, love wins! Tell them about the abundant life, the life that is full and rich in mercy and love. Tell them about a world, our world, where things are different- the outcasts are included, the rich and poor sit down together, where people who were nothing are now something, where forgiveness reigns, and where it isn't fundamentally about us. But, if you forget all that simply tell them this, Christ is risen; risen indeed.

Alleluia, amen.