5th Sunday of Easter

Sermon

1 Peter 2:4-10

 A television series called  *Crime Scene Investigation*, also referred to as ***CSI***, was a America forensics crime drama television which ran on [CBS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS) from October 2000 to September 2015. Each episode began with a soundtrack written by Pete Townshend and performed by his rock band called the Who. The song begins with the words, “Who are you? In the refrain it repeats, over and over again; “Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?....... I really want to know? They chose "Who Are You?" because it fits well with the theme of the show. The detectives would use forensic evidence to answer the question "Who Are You?" to find out who committed the crime.

 “Who are you?” is a question our society asks. If asked, you can define yourself with your name, where you live, what skills you have, your passions, your personality, and your values. It is as a way of determining who you are. For many people, one thing comes to mind when asked; “Who are You?”. They answer; “ I am nobody. I am just an ordinary person. I am not special.”

 We live in a world where great emphasis is placed on influence, power, wealth, and celebrity status. These are the elements of success in today’s world. It can make ordinary people feel rather worthless. And that is the reason why so many get caught up in going along with the crowd. They want to feel like somebody; they want to be accepted. And they feel they must do as others do to be accepted. Our sinful nature wants to believe what the world believes. It agrees with what the world says, talk like the world talks. If you want to be a somebody…… Be like them.

 Do you remember what this world view made Peter do the night Jesus was captured and put on trial? It was the reluctance, the unwillingness to admit to who he was that led to his betrayal of Jesus! In doing so he also denied who he was! It was sin! Peter does not want us to make that mistake! He has a message for today. Do not give up who you are for what the world wants you to be. We can be happy with who we are. We can overcome the pressures of the world to become like them! Let's take a look at this question! Who are we? We are Christians! So, **REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE!** Do you know that we are the most unique group of people on earth? Our text for today tells us why that is true. **As you come to him, the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, you also, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, in order to bring spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**

 Peter says that Christians are living stones, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood. If you had asked a Jew in ancient times to point out the most special building in his world, there is no doubt what his answer would be! The temple is! It was the dwelling place of God. Some of the Jewish converts to Christianity may have been feeling that something was missing. In their new faith, they may have been questioning why there was no temple, priests, and the daily sacrifices.

 The early Christians were also accused of being atheists by their pagan neighbors and by the authorities. This is because Christianity did not have temples, priests or sacrifices. There was no temple or idol that openly signified their faith. In fact, early Christianity did not have any of the things that most people usually associate with religion. They would have felt like outsiders. Out of place with the norm. Not part of the crowd. Not normal. Not part of the in-crowd. We are different. We are called stones. Living stones. That seems line strange doesn’t it?

 The CSI series had situations that required the detectives to leave no stone unturned. When looking for the criminal or killer, the forensic evidence would lead to a conviction. Peter says that we are living stones, but if you look at the forensic evidence, we are more like a cold stone. A stone cold killer caught by the evidence. Stone Cold! What does that mean? …..…absolutely ………stone cold…….categorically……..downright…..hands down….no doubt. Stone cold. Guilty. Why? Listen to what the Law says**; As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3)**

That is who we were. Not who we are! **REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE!** **6For it says in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will certainly not be put to shame.**

**7Therefore, for you who believe, this is an honor.**

 In the golden age of the temple of Jerusalem, what a glorious thing it must have been to be priest in the Temple.  Worship was led by choirs of priests, singing the psalms.  There were those who played instruments, those who offered sacrifices, those who taught. All serving God!

 The priests of Peter's day underwent a ritual washing every time they went to serve at the great temple.  There was a great basin of water at the entrance to God's house where they were cleansed before offering their service.  Only certain priests could enter the temple itself.  And only one priest could go into the special room called the Holy of Holies on a certain day of the year called Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement.

 But now the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross has cleansed all of his people for priestly service to God.  When Jesus died on the cross, water and blood flowed out of his side. The cleansing of Christ's blood for our sins. The washing away of that sin we receive in the sacrament of Baptism. How does this become ours? Through the gift of faith! **the one who believes in him will certainly not be put to shame.**

 The gift of faith makes us right with God. **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** (Ephesians 2:5-10)

   Now, as our text says; **Therefore, for you who believe, this is an honor.** **REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE!** We are all his priests: men, women, and children--set apart as special people to serve him forever. In the twelfth chapter of Romans 12 Paul urges us **to offer our bodies as living sacrifices as a spiritual act of worship.**  So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit**. (Ephesians 2:19-22) Every Christian is a living stone in the house of God. We are God's dwelling place.

 I look out my office window each morning as I work at my desk. I see the church building. The stone, brick and mortar. Oh, how I miss being there on Sunday morning. I miss the fellowship of believers coming together, the sound of the organ. The hymns echoing in the sanctuary. The comfortable feeling of being at home. In the house of the Lord.

 But the Church building is just stones. We however are different, special. We are the living stones. We make up his temple.   We are mortared together--our families, our church members. We have the cement of Jesus’ love that holds us together. And as living stones, we want to share that love. And that is what we have been doing right now. Right in the middle of this pandemic. Not from the physical building of our church, but from the temple God has built with his living stones.

 If a stone becomes loose, then the wall is unstable, and dangerous and can fall. We all know that to be true. And many of our stones were loose. I am not talking about the brick work at church. I am talking about the stones who have drifted away. But God in his wisdom had used, yes even this present situation, to bring many of those stones back. Making them alive again. Remember who you are! A living stone indeed!

 I can’t help but think of some other stones that are near the church. I can see them from my back porch. These are stones, some big and some small. They make the placed. Not a place of the living but where the dead have been put to rest. Living stones? I say yes. They mark the place, not of the dead but the living.

There’s an old church story about a widow who asked her pastor to call on her to discuss her planned giving and funeral plans.  When she got to the funeral plan, she said, “I’d like to be buried with a fork in my casket.”

The pastor was puzzled.  “Why?” he said.  The lady smiled.   “I’ve been to a lot of church suppers over the years, and at each one, as the main course is being finished, someone shouts from the kitchen ‘Save your forks! Something better is coming.’ So, I want to be buried with a fork, because I devoutly believe that something better is coming.” Jesus promised, in our Gospel reading for today. He will come again to take the living…living stones to be with him. So. Who are we? The Living stones indeed! **AMEN**