

Well since lockdown I've received some really nice emails from you that have helped me feel connected even though we've not been able to meet physically in church.

And always nice isn't it, if you've been ill or feeling a bit down, to get an email, card or text message from someone, offering some words of support, or just to say they've been praying for you.

In fact I've found it so encouraging over the years that I've kept a file of all the notes and cards I've received from people, so that when things get a bit tough; I can go back and read them; because they always have this knack of cheering me up, and spur me on to keep going.

And it may be the same for you

Well in a similar way 1 Peter is a letter of encouragement written to a group of scattered Christians' who are suffering all kinds of trials and persecution.

And so, Peter writes to encourage them in difficult circumstances to keep going and not to give up.

And in chapter 1 he does by reminding them of 3 things.

First, he says they shouldn't be surprised by their suffering; because as followers of Jesus, Christians can often experience hostility and rejection from the world simply because of their association with him.

Secondly, Peter reminds these Christians that although things are tough now, they can rejoice because of the privilege they have of being God's chosen people; born again into a living hope as members of God's family.

Which means that thirdly although what they're experiencing now is painful and difficult; its temporary, and they can look forward to an eternal inheritance in heaven where all their suffering and trials will come to an end.

So, for example in chapter 1v3 Peter says:

“In his great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”

Then in verse 6 he says: “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”

And so Peter says look I know you’re suffering now and it’s hard; but you can be joyful even in the most difficult of circumstances by remembering that you’re a child of God who has a glorious future waiting for you.

Isn’t that amazing, you see if you’re a Christian this morning; these promises apply to you as well; and they can be a real encouragement especially in our current situation

And I know if I received these words in a message from a friend, I know for a fact they’d go straight into to my encouraging email file.

Which brings us nicely to our passage!

You see a bit like Peter’s writing to a group of Christians who are scattered all over the place.

Chapter 1 verse 1 says:

To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

And so, in light of the current situation, when we’re locked out of our building and can’t meet in the usual way, I’ve got a question us:

What is the Church?

What is St. Mary and All Saints Bingham?

What are we here for and why do we meet every Sunday?

So, for example is Church just a lovely old building that we have the responsibility for to maintain?

Is Church a community hub where we meet with friends every week for a bit of a catch up?

Or is it venue for us to put on events to raise money for a historic building.

*Or is Church* primarily a place of worship.

Well in one sense it's all of those things isn't it

But you know Peter says the stones that hold up our beautiful building aren't the church.

We are.

Chapter 2 verse 4 says:

“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built into a spiritual house.”

In other words, the physical building we're unable to meet in at the moment isn't church.

The church is us.

Individual stones that are being built up and joined together as one with Christ who's the foundation.

Verse 6 says: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Or to put it another way when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we’re cemented to him; and to each other as we become part of a spiritual building of living stones.

So, the church isn’t a physical building it’s Christians joined to Christ and each other as one.

Which leads on to a second question:

What’s our purpose and what are we here for?

On July 4th, 2010 I was ordained into the priesthood by the Bishop of Grimsby in Lincoln Cathedral, how glamorous is that!

And for some people; they think that makes me special.

But listen to these words in verse 4:

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house: to be a *Holy Priesthood*, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

And then in verse 9: “But you are a chosen race, a *Royal Priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”

In other words, if you’re a Christian you’re a priest.

Now that doesn’t mean you’re all vicars called to lead the church; but as God’s chosen people you are called to live priestly lives that offer the spiritual sacrifices of worship, service, and holy living.

In all our failure and imperfection God calls us to such a high office!

But what does being a priest in Christ Church look like in practice.

How are members of God's royal priesthood, joined together as living stones, meant to live?

Well verse 1 tells us, it says:

“Put away all malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all slander.”

You see these things don't have any place among God's elect do they, because through faith in Christ we've become new people.

Peter says: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his grace and mercy you have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In other words, Peter says if you're a Christian be who you are, a royal priest, chosen by God to offer the spiritual sacrifice of a holy life.

That later on in chapter 2 includes our relationship to authority and government, employment, and the home.

In other words, we'll live differently as we relate to every sphere of life.

Well then in verse 2 Peter says:

“Like new-born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you've tasted that the Lord is good.”

When our first granddaughter was just a few weeks old her instinct when she was hungry was to feed on her mum's milk it sustained her, nourished her and helped her grow.

In the same way, Peter says that as members of royal priesthood, we need to feed on the pure spiritual milk of God's word.

You see if we've tasted the Lord's goodness and want to grow up to be spiritually mature; we need to be people of prayer who feed on God's word, the Bible; like a baby goes to its mother's breast for food.

If we don't, we just become spiritually malnourished and won't grow into the people God's calls us to be:

A royal priesthood who offer the spiritual sacrifices of worship, service, and holy living, with Christ at the centre.

Then thirdly, as the church what's our job? What are we here for?

Well after telling us who we are, Peter reminds of what we were; so, in verse 10 he says:

"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."

As a result, in verse 9 he says we're:

"To proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

And so that's our job, to proclaim!

And so, the work of the church is to faithfully share the gospel, by pointing people to the Lord Jesus Christ, who calls them out of the darkness of sin, into the light of his family the church.

And so finally, if we're Christians God has called each one of us, to play our part as a royal priests in his Church of living stones; by offering our lives to God as spiritual sacrifice of worship, service, and holy living, which in verse 5 we're told:

“Are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Amen