

1 Peter 2:1-12

“The thousands of people who become British citizens every year do so by completing a journey. For some people, that journey begins fleeing persecution in another part of the world before finding safety in the UK. For others, the purpose of the journey is to join family already settled in the UK. There is also a ‘learning’ journey involved – both cognitive and emotional, developed through the experience of living in the UK and learning about its institutions, its peoples and its cultures, gaining both knowledge and skills, and also developing a sense of belonging to the UK.”

That is a quote from a Government pamphlet on becoming a British Citizen.

It is interesting because it speaks of why a person might wish to become a citizen, of the route as a journey, of the learning involved and then of “developing a sense of belonging”.

It strikes me that this has resonances with the path into the Kingdom of God and being a Christian. Becoming a Christian is a journey, a journey that is taken for different reasons and there is learning involved as we first understand how we come to faith and then learn what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. Finally, as we saw a couple of weeks ago when we looked at the church as the body of Christ, there is a sense of belonging to Jesus and belonging in the body of Christ.

Today as we take another of the images of the church from the Bible we see more of that sense of belonging. Today we look at the image of the church as a building from these verses in 1 Peter 2.

The key part for us today is 1 Pet 2:4-5, “As you come to him, the living Stone— rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

As you come to him, that is Jesus, you are like living stones who are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood who offer spiritual sacrifices.

As we can see there are five things there all to do with our Christian discipleship under this image of the church as a building.

### **1. As you come to him.**

Again as we saw a couple of weeks ago our unity as a church is in Jesus and our mutual life and faith in him. It is as we kneel before Christ and accept him as Saviour and Lord that we become not just Christians but disciples of Jesus, we enter the Kingdom of God, become citizens of that kingdom and part of the body of Christ. The way in is through the cross.

I went to play cricket last week with David Garner. The game was at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Tadley. We thought we knew the way in so we went to the main gate but no that was wrong. So we tried another gate and that seemed more promising. However we ended up in a building but couldn't find any changing rooms or other cricketers. So I went to the bar and asked. A man standing by me overheard and said “but the cricket is on” pointing to the TV screen of test

cricket from Lords. Then another man directed us round the back of the building where we found a gap in the hedge leading us onto the cricket pitch. The others however showed us that there was a proper and much easier way in through gate from the car park. There is as many of us know only one way into the kingdom of God and it is an easy way and it is as we come to Jesus and accept his death on the cross as sufficient payment for our sin. The initial point for these Christians in becoming part of the church of Jesus Christ this spiritual house was coming to him.

So for us we need to come to I don't mean wake as from a doze sleep or coma though perhaps I do but I mean come to Jesus. Now for some of us there needs to be a beginning here, a starting with Jesus, a point where we accept him as Saviour and through that come into God's kingdom. If that is you then please talk to someone about it. Talk to me and let's see how we can help you into the kingdom of God. You may have been coming for years, done Alpha or Christianity Explored and still not sure. Well speak to me and perhaps I can put you in touch with someone and you can talk with them. "As you come to him" that is the starting point.

However for many of us we have as it were come to Jesus. We have found faith in him. For us the encouragement of Peter to come to him refers to the daily hour by hour drawing close to Jesus for it is as we come to him daily that we

## **2. become like living stones**

It is as we come to Jesus we become alive, alive to God as the Holy Spirit brings the life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit into our beings. In Jesus we become alive to God, and in the way that a living body is sensitive where a dead body isn't. In coming to Jesus we come alive to God and then as these living stones we are

## **3. being built into a spiritual house**

Here we see the church as a building but not a physical building but a spiritual building. It's spiritual because it houses the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). We as individuals come to Jesus. He, through the Holy Spirit, gives us new life and builds us together into a temple. Together we become the dwelling place of God. In the past people have spoken about the "house of God" and certainly in the Old Testament the Temple was just that for that was where God had said he would dwell but now we individually and corporately are the house of God for God dwells in us as his people. So when we talk of the church as a building we are not talking bricks and mortar but people who are the stones made alive to God by the power of the Holy Spirit being joined together.

I remember years back going down to Wiltshire to a friends house to help with some work he was doing. It involved knocking down an old building. It was a fascinating exercise because all kinds of materials had been used in building this large shed including flint and the variety of shapes and sizes

of flints were amazing. As you knocked one flint out you would see the imprint of it left in the mortar. Quite clearly selecting the right shape and size of flint and fitting them in had been very difficult because you can't shape a flint. I thought how much easier it would have been with a softer stone that could have been cut shaped and moulded to fit. (Church Nature of 17 – Christian 6)

We are drawn to Christ but many of us are flinty characters and it isn't easy for God to build us into the church. What is needed is a bit of give isn't it, a bit of willingness to be malleable in the hands of God and a touch more softness as we rub shoulders with others in the church. We need to be open to God to allow him to remove the sharp corners that some of us have which make getting along with other Christians difficult. But then also as I think of being built together I have the picture of flat pack furniture. You put the stuff together and then at the end there is a screw that is left over and you think how can that be? Why hasn't that one fitted in? I think we can easily be like that screw, keeping ourselves on the edge of the church not wanting for one reason or another really to be part of it. However, God the Holy Spirit is pulling us towards the church and wanting to fit us in to link us together and my encouragement is to allow him to do that. It may be through joining a homegroup, being regular in worship, or, as I said a couple of weeks ago simply chatting to those around you when we meet together. This church is a building site and God is at work to build us together into a spiritual house and we are built into the spiritual house

#### **4. To be a Holy Priesthood.**

These Christians are described not just as the stones that form the house but the priests who serve in it.

In the temple system the priest was special because he had access to God and he acted as a mediator between the people and God. So if you wanted to worship God by offering a sacrifice you had to come along to the priest dragging your sheep or whatever and get the priest to do it for you. Now in the new temple it is different. They and we are all as it were priests. They and we all have free access to the throne of God not in the holy of holies but in heaven. As they had come to Christ they had been made holy. They had also been set apart to serve God. So Peter described them and us as a holy priesthood those set apart to serve God in his temple, the church.

#### **5. offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

That was their task as priests to offer sacrifices but not of grain or animals but spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God because of their relationship to God the Father through God the Son and in the power of God the Holy Spirit. As they came to Jesus so their sacrifices became acceptable. that was what Peter was expecting of those early Christians and what God is expecting of us. So what were the spiritual sacrifices Peter expected of them and which God might look for from us?

a. praise and thanksgiving for all God has done for us. There is no need for any other sacrifice because Jesus has done everything for us on the cross. We offer up a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God from grateful hearts. That's what Peter encouraged these Christians to do in 1 Peter 1:3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." How about you? Does your day start with praise to God for your salvation and the hope that is in you? Have you come here today to thank God for all he has done for you individually but then also, having been built together, for all God has done for us as a church? Today we especially want to do that as we draw our Giving in Grace programme to a close and to recognise the way that God has worked amongst us not just in the increase in giving but in growing as disciples in the blessings through the 24/7 prayer room, the little GIG tea and the Big GIG worship time. Perhaps you have been blessed by God over these weeks then share it with others and a good way to do that is through the magazine so together as a church we share in the blessing of God and in offering up to him a sacrifice of praise.

b. our prayers – as we read in Psalm 141:2, "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice". Our sacrifice is in our prayers which rise like incense to the very throne of God. In our prayers we offer up our church and our life together as well as our many personal concerns and the needs of our world. Prayer is part of the spiritual sacrifice we offer up to God as a holy priesthood. So how is your prayer life? As FB Meyer once put it "the great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer but unoffered prayer." May we be those who daily enjoy that role of priests as we offer up a sacrifice of prayer for our world and our church and our friends as well as for ourselves.

"As you come to him, the living Stone— rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

What is the church? it is a spiritual building where God lives by his Spirit. May we be those who as we daily come to Christ share his life and are open and malleable to be built into his house with him as the foundation stone and there minister to and for him in sacrifices of praise and prayer.