

Building With Live Bodies

Cycle #3 – Session #7

Building with Live Bodies

Text: 1 Peter 1:13-2:10

Gathering

Opening Worship

Light a candle as a reminder of God's presence. You may want to light a single candle during this opening time of worship and invite the group to bring the candle or at least the candle holders so that in the closing worship which will mark the end of this series, you can light each person's candle as a reminder of the light you take with you.

Song: In the Bulb There is a Flower -- #638 *Chalice Hymnal*

Litany

You are tender and compassionate, Adonai –
slow to anger and always loving:

**your indignation doesn't endure forever,
and your anger lasts only for a short time.**

You never treat us as our sins deserve;
You don't repay us in kind for the injustices we do.

**For as high as heaven is above the earth,
So great is the love for those who revere you.**

As tenderly as parents treat their children,
How tenderly you treat your worshipers, Adonai!

**For you know what we are made of –
you remember that we're nothing but dust.**

We last no longer than grass,
Live no longer than a wildflower;

**one gust of wind and we are gone,
never to be seen again.**

Yet your love lasts from age to age
for those who revere you, Adonai,

**so does your goodness to our children's children,
and to those who keep your Covenant
and remember your precepts.**

Psalm 103:8-18

Welcome One Another. Share briefly with one another something you have learned or appreciated during the weeks of this Bible study and the time you have been meeting with this group. It may be something you hadn't known about the scripture or it may be a connection between pieces you hadn't noticed before or perhaps something you've discovered about yourself or others in your group or about God.

Cycle #3 – Session #7

Scripture

I Peter 1:13-2:10 (NRSV)

¹ ¹³ Therefore prepare your minds for action; * discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴ Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵ Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth * so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply * from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. * ²⁴ For

‘All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures for ever.’

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

² ¹ Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵ 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. ⁶ For 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.’

⁷ To 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’,

⁸ and
‘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.

⁹ But 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Dwelling in Scripture

1st reading - Allow people time to reflect on what they have heard.
Note the word or phrase which drew your attention this time.

2nd reading - Invite people to talk about what they have heard and where it might intersect with their lives.

Behind the Text

When I began to work on the list of texts to be used in these 21 sessions I knew this text would be in the third cycle. However, as sometimes happens, each time I started to work on it, an inner voice kept saying, “*Not yet.*” Mostly I’ve learned I might as well listen to that voice sooner rather than later, particularly when it is persistent. So here we are, at the very end of our journey together, a journey that while continuing, will carry us into new and different directions. Perhaps our paths will cross again, perhaps not. Either way God who has guided us thus far, will continue to guide us on our journeys.

I Peter is one of those books which didn’t start out being among the ones I’d have considered significant or even with which I had more than a passing acquaintance. But like many texts eventually someone drew my attention to something within its pages which seemed to bring a message that I needed to hear. Over a period of time, I have discovered the message is one which others may need as well.

This letter is addressed to the Christians living throughout what is now Turkey. Some have suggested it was written to encourage them. Others have suggested that it was to serve as a guide for those who had become followers of Christ, but who had much to learn about what that meant for daily life. However, it seems to me to be above all a message of hope, a message certainly needed at the time of writing, but desperately needed in our time.

Barbara Tuchman in her book, ***A Distant Mirror***, points out that we generally like to think each generation, each century is becoming better than the one before it. She also suggests that there are occasionally centuries the historians would like to forget. The fourteenth century is one of those. It was the time of the first hundred years war which ended only when the nations of Europe were exhausted by the fighting, the plague, and finally the lack of resources. She draws a parallel to our own time in which it has now been more than a hundred years since there was no war going on in some part of our planet and much of that time our own country has been involved in those wars in some way. While we can point to many good things from the past century, there is much that is discouraging and disappointing.

Where is the hope? I Peter comes to us with a word. Hope which rests not in our actions, but in God who is the source of all life and hope. God who had the first word will also have the last word. The Creator who brought all that is into being is also the God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory so that in him we may live in faith and hope.

Because in this century we are used to being able to identify who has written something and then judge the writing on the basis of the author, there's a tendency to want to also be able to point to the persons who wrote various books and letters with in our Bible. In reality, we rarely know who the writers were and we have to judge their writings on the message rather than the person. At first glance it would seem we might know about I Peter. The tradition dates almost the beginning. Some of the early church fathers knew its content or referred to it by that name. Clement of Rome writing near the first century mentioned it. Polycarp who died about the middle of the second century seems to have been influenced by it. Irenaeus who wrote toward the end of the second century quoted from it. On the other side, however, the text itself seems to suggest otherwise. That instead of being written by Peter, one of his disciples, one of the inheritors of his teaching, seems more likely.

Knowing a little about Peter, whose name the book carries, may be helpful in understanding the teaching in its pages. It seems likely he was a contemporary of Jesus, born sometime between 10 BCE and 10 CE, perhaps in Bethsaida, a bilingual and multicultural city. He appears to have received a double name at birth, Simeon (Hebrew) and Simon (Greek). It seems likely that many people in Galilee could speak both Aramaic and at least the common Greek. Whether Peter had the kind of education which would have made it possible for him to write this letter is unknown, but it seems unlikely. He did, however, travel through the Greek speaking world. He was married and his wife went with him on later missions trips. (I Cor. 9:5). He and his brother Andrew were in the fishing business. As such they would have been "middle" class business people, craftsmen or tradesmen like Paul. Sometime during Jesus ministry Jesus of Nazareth called Simon to be his disciple. Based on a very few hints Peter has been portrayed as impulsive and quick to anger. But balancing that picture is the one of a man who was capable of leading the disciples, pulling them together after Jesus' death and then becoming a spokesperson within the early church. He is shown to be the one who preached at Pentecost. He seems to have been the one who recognized Jesus as the Messiah before the crucifixion. After the resurrection Jesus gave him the appellation of "Rock" or Cephas as in the solid foundation upon which the church would be built. In time he came to be called by that name, Peter in Greek (*Craddock, Bohring, The People's Commentary*, p. 723) He was crucified in Rome in 64 CE.

It is that date which seems to raise questions about his authorship of this letter. But whether or not he wrote it, the letter is solidly grounded in the theology of the first century church and seems to be indebted to both Petrine and Pauline teachings. The historical information found in the document itself seems to indicate it was written sometime around 90 CE and spoke so forcefully to the churches to which it was sent, that it was understood to be of great value. The letter itself which was sent to multiple churches would have been read to the whole community during worship.

The churches of Asia Minor were experiencing distress. They were living in a hostile social environment. Things weren't as bad as they would become later. There doesn't appear to have been any active persecution by the government. There may have been mistreatment by local officials, but nothing systematic or open. Peter's positive attitude towards government would indicate that there was not any mistreatment and at least in

the writer's opinion, the government and civic leaders were worthy of respect. The letter offers encouragement to people attempting to live faithfully in that environment and assures them their hope lies in God.

One of the things you may wish to do is to read the whole book. It does not take long to read the 108 verses of which it is comprised. In it you will find a variety of references which seem to connect the writing and the writer to the larger Christian community. The particular passage on which we are focusing in this session is one that nestles in the middle and invites the reader/hearer to trust what they see and hear, recognizing that it is God who is the source of life.

Observation

Originally I had planned to suggest that our focus be on the first ten verses of the second chapter. However, after reading Craddock and Bohring's commentary, in which they suggest that the passage which begins at Ch. 1:13 and goes to 2:10 deserves to be seen as a unit. Chapter markings are based on convenience and are not necessarily placed according to the structure of the passage or the topic at hand. By beginning earlier the whole passage becomes richer and the meaning clearer.

In the opening verses of Peter's letter he has greeted the communities to which he is writing and assured them of God's mercy and grace. And then verse 13 begins "therefore." That's one of those transition words which seems to point toward... *If what has been said to this point is true, then.* In this case Peter moves to a consideration of how one can live faithfully in a hostile environment, neither fighting with the environment nor controlled by it.

The first of the many imperatives and instructions given in this passage, "prepare your minds for action" translated more literally means, "gird up the loins of your mind." The picture in my head for this comes from living in India where women wearing saris would go out to work in the fields. In order to be able to do the work, they would gather up their saris, tuck them into their waist band so their long skirts weren't dragging on the ground or in their way. In much the same way men and women wearing loose garments would have prepared for work. Another way of translating this might be "roll up your sleeves and get ready for hard work." (Craddock Bohring, p. 728) In order to do the kind of work to which Peter is calling them to they need to prepare their minds for what is ahead.

Consider

Being able to live peaceably in a hostile environment will require intelligent behavior. Lax habits or poor thinking will not help them. Another way of looking at this is to recognize that we actually have three brains. The first part of the brain is purely reactive and keeps our physical bodies functioning. It is sometimes referred to as the "reptilian brain." The second part of the brain, the Limbic System or the "mammalian brain" is also primarily reactive, but it is the site of emotional behavior, our ability to bond with others. It isn't the site of thinking. When living in a hostile or difficult environment, the Neo Cortex, the big brain and site of rational thought, is extremely

important. Clear thinking, being in charge of what we do and say, being proactive rather than reactive allows us the greatest freedom and flexibility even when dealing with people who are hostile or difficult.

Look at what Peter writes from this perspective. Are there times and places this perspective may be helpful to you in living your own life of faith?

Observation

Notice the list of instructions which Peter gives them.

1. Prepare your mind for this work.
2. Be in control of your desires, not controlled by them.
3. Rely on your knowledge of Christ.
4. Trust in God – live in reverent fear (awe).
5. Because of God's actions, you can have hope and live your life in hope.

These are things which will enable you to live in the midst of the difficulties that go with being in this time of "exile." At this point Christians have apparently been scattered and separated from the large communities of Christians. It appears that their neighbors viewed them with suspicion. This time in which they were living was a time of testing and preparation for becoming a holy people.

Consider

One of the first steps in any transformation is preparation. How do you see yourself preparing or being prepared for the future? As you look at the five things in the list above, what do you see as easy? Difficult? Growing?

Observation

The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:1-8) to which Jesus is compared was not a lamb which was sacrificed for sins. Rather the Passover Lamb represented deliverance from death and slavery. In other places Peter affirmed the atonement theology of the early church, but here he uses this term to express the exodus from an old way of life to the new. They were no longer slaves to the old ways, but free to live in new ways.

Consider

What does your faith free you from? To?

Observation

Peter reminds them that love is at the heart of their faith. They are to love one another genuinely and to live their lives as an expression of the love they have received. This is at the heart of Jesus' teaching and while it may have been engrained in every Jewish Christian because they were already deeply grounded in "*Love the Lord your God with your whole being*" and also knew the second commandment, "*Love your neighbor as you love yourself*," even they would have spent a life time learning to love that deeply.

Gentiles began the journey at a different place and yet these qualities were as important to their lives and the life of the Christian community as they were for those who'd been taught these precepts from the beginning.

Consider

Where and how do you see love affecting your own life and the life of your congregation, community? What happens when people disagree with one another? Is love still visible in the way people treat one another? What happens when new people come into the community? Is there room for them or are they considered to be outsiders and shut out?

Observation

Those who have become followers of Jesus are seen as "being born anew." This is not about what is perishable in their lives. Life is still very short. No matter how many years we may live, life is short. But on the other side, there are qualities within us that go on living. This life isn't the end of the story and while we don't know what follows, we do know that the persons who've been a part of our lives continue to touch and influence us. Those who are loved, learn to love. Those who care for others, that care is never lost.

Consider

Who are people who have helped shape your life, your faith? How do you see their qualities living in you? In other people? What qualities would you like to pass on to others?

Observation

The opening verse in Chapter 2 goes straight to those things which can destroy individuals and churches. "Rid yourselves, therefore of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and slander." According to the dictionary, *malice* means *a desire to inflict injury on another*. *Guile* means *insidious cunning in attaining a goal*. The others are perhaps easier to spot and recognize. All of these behaviors are a form of selfishness intended to lift up the interests of one person rather than the good of the whole. When these are let loose in a church, the end result can be disastrous and the resulting wounds can take years to heal if they ever do. If healing is to occur, it will only take place when there is an acknowledgement of the destructive behaviors and a change of direction.

The passage continues the imagery of new life with the reference to spiritual milk. Before children are ready for adult food, they need the care and nurture which will allow them to mature. The same is true of new Christians. One of the challenges, however, is that as people mature in their faith, the "food" they take in also needs to mature. It is said that most people stop growing spiritually around the age of 12 and that many people assume there is no need to continue their spiritual faith education beyond 6th grade or so.

Consider

Are or have any of these things gone on in your congregation? Or in your own life and relationships? How have the situations been handled? What are things you have done or are doing to nurture your spiritual growth or the growth of others?

Observation

The imagery of living stones is one that might be used more. The idea of building a spiritual house focuses on the fact individual Christians have a role to play, but it is the community of believers who build the temple where God can dwell.

In verses 3 to 8 there are three references to stones which for those first readers would have made a connection. *Isa. 28:16, Isa 8:14, and Hosea 1:6-9*. They understood those texts to refer to Jesus who had been rejected not only by the Jewish leaders, but people in general. They would also have seen themselves as rejected and that as Christ was vindicated, so they would be vindicated in the end.

My own appreciation of this picture of living stones who are being built into a spiritual house comes from my father-in-law, Ned Roberts, who was for 15 years a missionary in Congo as well as a very wise pastor, and dear friend for many more years. The language which was spoken in Mondombe where he and his family lived and worked lacked a way of expressing the continuous present. For example we might say that something is living or dying, but in Lingala they would say that a thing was either alive or dead. If something was dead, it might not be all that dead or if it was really and truly dead, it was *dead, dead*. A house which was in good repair and filled with daily family life was a living house. A house that was empty deserted, or falling into disrepair would have been dead or if it was beyond saving, it would have been dead dead. When I read this passage, I think of churches that I have known and how the presence of the people of that community in conjunction with God, were making that a holy place and the community was very much alive. There was ministry occurring which reached beyond the buildings front door. There were people engaged in lively worship, studying and praying together. They were doing new things and people were involved in every aspect of the congregation's life. They were the living stones of whom the church was being built.

A church without people isn't a church. A church where there is no real spiritual life or presence isn't a church. Without the people there is no church.

Consider

How alive are you? Are you one of the living stones? How alive is your congregation? Are you as a church building a "spiritual house?" What is the connection between the activities of prayer, study, and worship, and the work the congregation does in nurturing members, caring for others, and sharing the good news beyond the church's doors?

Observation

Those who are followers of Christ are new “people of God.” As the Jews had been, so the new community is also. As the people of God there is an important message which will sustain and give them hope no matter what. ¹⁰*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.* Because this is true they are able to proclaim the mighty acts of God. Whatever is going on where they live and work, they are free. They belong to God.

Consider

Is this true for you?

Activity (Optional)

As a group, create a picture of your church as a church built of living stones. You might do this in any number of ways, so choose a way that fits your resources and time. You might invite people to bring pictures and create a collage poster to share with others. You might draw a building and using the names of the people of your congregation put those on stones that form the sides of the wall. If you have a lot of polished rocks, you might put names of people on one side and the name of their gift on the other and then share those stones with others.

Practicing the Presence

As you come to the end of the 3 cycles of this study, where have you seen change in our own life, in the lives of others, in your congregation? Are you aware of areas where change is needed? What are you willing to do to make those changes? What gives you hope?

Lloyd Alexander who wrote the *Chronicles of Prydain* also put the stories of many of the individual characters of the series in a small book entitled, ***The Foundling***. The title refers to the wizard, Dalben, who is the source of great wisdom all through the *Chronicles*. As a baby he was rescued by three witches who raise him. About the only restriction they place on him is he must never taste their brew. Because he grows into a bright, beautiful and helpful boy he helps with many things. One day he is stirring their brew, the hot liquid boils up and splashes on his hand. Without thinking he pops his burned fingers into his mouth. He immediately sees the witches for who they really are and the world as it is. There just isn’t room in their small cottage for all that knowledge. He must go out into the world and make his own way. He is to choose a gift to take with him. He is offered symbols of fame, fortune, and power, but realizes all of those are temporary and easily lost. He is then offered *The Book of Three*, which contains all wisdom and all that knowledge.

That is the one he chooses and so sets out on his journey, reading as he goes. At first his reading is filled with happiness, so he resolves to read to the end of it without a pause. But less than half way through the book he begins to read of all the horrors in the world. Each page pierces his heart until the book is so heavy he must stop. All night he lies on the ground shattered by hopelessness and despair. The next morning when he arises he discovers as he gets a drink of water, that he is no longer the boy he'd been, but an old man. At that moment he also realizes his gift has not come to him without price and asks, "...is the cost of wisdom so high? I thought knowledge was joy. Instead it is grief beyond bearing."

He picks up the book and begins to read again. Now the pages speak not only of pain and death, but of birth and new life as well. The pain is tempered by joy. At last he understands while nothing is certain, all is possible. "At the end of knowledge, wisdom begins. And at the end of wisdom there is not grief, there is hope." As he is hobbling along a farmer stops and asks him if he'd like a lift to which he answers, "Thank you just the same, but I have strength enough now to go to the end of my road." "And where might that be?" "I do not know, I go seeking it." "Well then," said the farmer, "may you be lucky enough to find it." "Luck? Not luck, but hope, indeed, hope."

So may it be for you also. Whatever the journey ahead of you may hold, may you have enough hope to carry you to its end.

One last prayer from ***Celtic Prayers***:

Lord of my heart, give me vision to inspire
me, that working or resting, I may
always think of you.

Lord of my heart, give me light to guide me,
That, at home or abroad, I may always
Walk in your way.

Lord of my heart, give me wisdom to direct
me, that thinking or acting, I may
always discern right from wrong.

Lord of my heart, give me courage to
strengthen me, that, among friends
or enemies, I may always proclaim your
justice.

Lord of my heart, give me trust to console
me, that hungry or well-fed, I may
always rely on your mercy.

Lord of my heart, save me from empty
praise, that I may always boast of you.

Lord of my heart, save me from worldly
wealth, that I may always look to the
riches of heaven.

Lord of my heart, save me from military

prowess, that I may always seek your protection.
Lord of my heart, save me from vain knowledge, that I may always study your word.
Lord of my heart, save me from unnatural pleasures, that I may always find joy in your wonderful creation.
Heart of my own heart, whatever may befall me, rule over my thoughts and feelings, my words and actions.

(P. 45)

Since your preparation for Session 7 began the week before, if you wish to continue using something of the same pattern, there may have been scriptures which came to your attention, but which you didn't have an opportunity to pursue. You may wish to explore some of those in the time ahead. If your whole group wishes to continue studying together, there are good resources available. You might also wish to commit with others of your group to divide up the work and develop your own studies. One person may be responsible for worship, another with finding out about the scripture, someone else provide the activity, and everyone commit to praying with the text and explore what it might say to them and others.

Suggested Reading Pattern

- 1st Read and listen to the text. Notice phrases that seem familiar or stand out for you. You may want to read it out loud or you may want to read it with someone else.
- 2nd Choose a word or phrase to carry with you and reflect on it as it comes to your mind through the day. (If you read at night – let the word or phrase rest overnight and pick it up in the morning. Remember the pattern of creation – “evening and morning” You may receive fresh insights when you waken.)
- 3rd During the week read, “Behind the Text” and the “Observations/Consider” portions. Even a few minutes spent each day or several times a week, will enrich your experience of the study and the experience of your small group.

Closing Worship

Words to carry with you -

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
This is the good news which is given to each of us. Carry this knowledge with you wherever you go and share it with all you meet.

Prayer

As you have done in each session, notice the person on your right and on your left. Hold them in prayer during this week. If there are special joys or concerns share them with one another.

Response (Responsively)

From where we are to where you need us,
Christ be beside us.
From what we are to what you can make of us
Christ be before us.
From the mouthing of generalities to making signs of your kingdom,
Christ be beneath us.
Through the streets of this world to the Gates of heaven,
Christ be above us.
Surround us with your presence,
Inspire us with your purpose,
Confirm us in your love. Amen

Wee Worship Book, p. 79, Wild Goose Publications

Blessing

**Let us go forth into the new seasons of our lives,
growing and changing and living by God's grace.
Let us go with caring awareness for the world and all that is in it,
discovering needs and opportunities around us.
Let us go from this place in peace and led out in joy
To live in God's continuing presence
With the power to love and the strength to serve.**

Song: Lo, I Am with You -- #430 Chalice Hymnal