

NOT A PRIVATE MATTER**1 Peter 2:4-10****(Read 1 Peter 2:4-10)**

INTRO: This is my 600th Sunday sermon since becoming pastor here at ABC. You have listened to me get up and stumble and stutter and falter at humor while at the same time breaking the bread of life for almost 15 years. I'm not a stellar preacher but God is good and he uses flimsy vessels like me to teach his word as his Holy Spirit explains it to your hearts.

And you do listen. In previous churches I sometimes wondered if people were hearing my words. In some cases, I knew they weren't, because I remember one time sitting on the platform, behind my senior pastor as he preached, and I counted 16 sleeping men on just the side that I could see. I knew on any Sunday I preached, those same guys and more would be sleeping.

But you do listen. I rarely see any of you nodding off. Instead of being like Mr. Bean, trying to stay awake, most often you are focused in on what I'm saying. And I know you listen, because often you repeat back to me something I've said for clarification or to take issue. That is gratifying to this preacher. And when you go out on a Sunday morning and you shake my hand (and least when we are actually here and not worrying about social distancing) and you say to me, "Good sermon, Pastor" I know it's not a platitude. And often you will say, "Wow, I really needed that today!" and I know, that even though I felt I've faltered; the Holy Spirit has not, and together we've nailed it.

I just needed to share that with you. Not just because this is the 600th sermon I've preached since June of 2005, but because it's a bit of a picture of how growing in holiness is not a private matter. As I preach, we all grow as the Holy Spirit expands the Word to our hearts and minds, and I am affirmed by your feedback. It's just one example of how we need each other to grow.

This series, loosely based on Luke Keefer's book, EVERYTHING NECESSARY began as a Lenten Series, but, since it was 8 messages instead of 6, it has now expanded past Easter for this week and next week. It is a series on holiness and one cannot hurry the subject of holiness – Christ Followers need to take their time and get it right. And as I began in my opening, I want to go further with the truth that holiness is not a private matter. We help one another along the way. It's always true, but we've really realized over the past almost 6 weeks that one another is indispensable. It's not impossible but you cannot easily succeed at being holy when you are Lone Ranger. In fact William Barclay writes "*Individualistic Christianity is an absurdity.*" It just doesn't work and mainly because it is not meant to work. We need one another. Let me unpack it.

First . . .

Jesus is our model

- Jesus is the Living Stone who is our example. Look at his example:
- Jesus was always with others – his disciples. I'm not espousing communal living – but community is key for Christ Followers
- Jesus was always for others – a lost world. In Luke 19 he proclaims that he came to . . . *seek and to save the lost.* Luke 19:10b.
- There is always someone who needs what we have to offer. We need our brothers and sisters and they need us.
- There is a world out there full of lost people who need us and no matter who we are, we are commissioned to make them into disciples.
- Holiness is realizing that we follow Jesus as our model and we follow closely.

Holiness is a group effort

- Purity and spiritual health is everybody's business. We are held accountable. We are called to hold others accountable. As we work together, we are holy together. I have a friend who told me about how he once encountered in a restaurant a man and a woman from his church who were not married to one another (though they were both married). These two were obviously engaged in a romantic meeting, and so he confronted them with the wrongness of the situation, the man responded to my friend, "*Mind your own *&%# business!*" The truth was, that is exactly what my friend was doing. He WAS minding is business. We are called to hold one another accountable.

- Now, that kind of confrontation takes boldness and courage, but it's necessary. The best way to start it is make yourself accountable and ask others to hold you accountable. I do this with my Mighty Men. They check up on me every other week. I expect them too. But sometimes it's just necessary to be that person who steps in and asks the hard questions. If we are the church be know that body life means oneness of heart. And when someone strays, we need to help them back. And when we are the one who is straying, to have someone confront us means we are loved and it reminds us that purity and holiness is a group effort. That is Church – being the Church is not a private matter.
- Now we get to what Peter is saying about the Church. . .

We are living stones built into a spiritual house.

- Jesus is THE Living Stone. As a result he is THE Cornerstone and he is THE Keystone. Without him the house crumbles. But he is there. He's holding the Church together.
- This past week I had a conversation with someone who claimed evangelicals have forfeited their validity because of their political allegiances. His implication was that the Church itself was dying because of this. My reply to him was to validate his concern about the alliances some have forged out of politics rather than faith, which is, indeed very concerning for me as well. But his concern that the Church was in its death throes was completely off-base. The Church will not die. The religious creations of human beings will fail, but the Church of Jesus Christ will never falter because he is the keystone and his victory was what we celebrated last week. He will not be vanquished and because of that, neither will his Church.
- What, in fact, this is illustrating, is how Jesus, the living stone, is a stone of stumbling described by Peter in verse 8. When anyone takes their eyes off of Christ and looks in any other direction for deliverance or validity or power, they will certain stumble over him and fall flat it's a vivid picture.
- So we need to be living stones built around Jesus, the foundation stone. And that means we need to stick together. That means we will be VERY close. We will draw strength from one another. It is definitely NOT a private matter.
 - Let me try to illustrate this. In the region surrounding our Navajo Brethren in Christ Mission in northwestern New Mexico, where I lived for three years, there are numerous Anasazi ruins. The Anasazi, which means, "Ancient Ones" were Pueblo Indians who were very prevalent in the region a thousand and more years ago and are the ancestors of the Hopi, Zuni, and other Pueblo Native American tribes. Some Anasazi build cliff dwellings and if you've ever been to Mesa Verde in southern Colorado, you have seen their work.
 - One extensive example of Anasazi architecture is just 21 miles southwest of BIC Mission at Chaco Canyon. I spent countless hours exploring Chaco and I was always amazed at the intricate stonework of the extensive walls and kivas of what remained of the thousand year old ruins. The amazing thing about the stonework when you really look close, is that there isn't any mortar at all. The stones are fit together so tightly and perfectly they need nothing to make them adhere. Their strength comes from one another.
- That is how living stones work. Living stones fit tightly together. Living stones work closely together. Living stones are strong because of they are drawing from one another. How effective is one stone? It can be skipped across a pond and after it makes a few exhilarating splashes it's done and sinks lost into the depths. Or it can be used for something destructive like a weapon or thrown through a window. But in a wall it's strong because it's strong together with other stones.
- Living stones are living because they are in Christ, and because they are together.

Conclusion: One more thing, in conclusion: Being a Christ Follower is not a private matter for one more reason. It needs to be all over us whose we are. I remember how in a presidential election several decades ago a candidate, actually the one I was voting for told an interviewer that his faith was a private matter. I was disappointed in him. I believed then, as I do now, and as I've been repeatedly saying here in this talk, that our faith is NOT a private matter. It actually must be what defines us. It is who we are, and better yet, whose we are. Now, having read his biography in the last year I've determined he was a great man of faith and I feel better about him. But never let it be quoted of you that your faith is a private matter.

Be living stones. Living for Jesus, living for others and make sure you radiate at the fact that you are a Christ Follower is NOT a private matter! Amen.