

Gannon Sims | 08.21.22
1 Peter 2:1-5, 9-12

Being the Church in the world: Who We Are

One of my teachers is the Christian ethics professor Stanley Hauerwas. And phrase I remember him repeating early and often is that *the purpose of the church is to show the world that it is not the church.*

And I remember not liking this phrase very much when I first heard it. I was offended by it. I was tired of the church setting up categories that created a sort of *us* versus *them* mentality and that's what I thought Hauerwas was doing. But when I put this phrase next to 1 Peter 2, I understand more clearly at what Hauerwas is getting at. *Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, through them malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge* (v 12).

In his book *Resident Aliens*, co-written with the great preacher Will Willimon Hauerwas says that ethics—and ethics are the moral principles which govern our behavior—is “training on how to see.”

We can't *do* until we *see*. We learn to speak by imitating what we hear. Then we learn what the rules are.

So the church is a living experiment in learning how to see a new world.

Jesus is the Word made flesh who makes visible the image of the invisible God. We are living demonstrations— we are living stones allowing ourselves to be built into a spiritual house.

Hauerwas says that in the church “we are invited to become part of an alien, exiled people who make a difference not because we are accommodating to the world but because we see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ.”

To be the church in the world means that we're allowing ourselves to be built into a spiritual house.

1 Peter is considered to be a *catholic* letter. And that means that it was written to have universal appeal. It's not addressed to a particular church as was Colossians or Galatians. It's written to the church in the world. It's a scattered church that feels alienated from society—its' a group of believers that are being slandered for their faith.

Some of you have just had your first week at school and if you're feeling odd and out of place— that's normal. Because as a follower of Jesus you've learned to see differently. You're functioning under a different story and a different set of rules, the story says that that there is nothing to fear because God is with us.

And the hard part for me is that we only get an hour or maybe two a week to tell you that. And then there are 166 hours for lots of other stories to get inside of us.

So every day we must wake up and come to him who is the living stone and let ourselves be built into a beautiful picture that will show the world that it is not what they think it is.

It's a spiritual house shaped by the story of our salvation. Salvation means that we need saving, that we can't do it ourselves. It means that we were once slaves but now we've been delivered.

The story of creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, Church. That we covered last week. Talk about these things with one another at the lunch table, as you drive around and as you go to sleep at night. For this is how we learn to see and learn to make visible the invisible God.

Today we're in part three of a four part series on what we believe as a church. It's our leadership council's best attempt to articulate a concise description of the faith we profess. We've looked at *Who God is*, *What God Does* and today we're looking at *Who we Are* as living stones being built together as a spiritual house that shows the world that it is not the church.

We are created in the image of God.

“We have been fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:14). Because this is true, we can love ourselves and learn to see ourselves as God does.”

An image is a reflection of something greater. That something greater is the transcendent God. We make ordinary— that which is completely out of the ordinary.

We are embodied persons. We have arms and legs, fingers and toes. We have belly buttons that show us that we didn't create ourselves—we're not self-originating nor are we self reproducing.

Our physical bodies have beauty and dignity. They have a story to tell. The body is not merely a biological category— it is also a theological one. Our bodies

proclaim the Gospel. In his book *For The Body*, author Tim Tennant says that our body gives us representative capacity, relational capacity and moral capacity. We are stewards of God's household. We are given dominion over the world. This is different from domination. We're born and we live within a web of relationships—some we know, some we don't.

We have the capacity to enter into a covenantal relationship with God. Our moral capacity shows how we are bearers of Christ's presence in the world. Remember my friend, Dave Fitch, the professor at Northern Seminary who declares the power of Christ who is faithfully present whenever he and his son sit down at the breakfast table together.

Moral capacity also allows us to discern right from wrong. We are created good, but we are broken.

We are broken.

“The image of God in us remains, but we have been broken and separated from God (Genesis 3:22; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 5:12; Psalm 14:2-3). Because this is true, we don't have to act like we are perfect or judge others for their imperfections.” (from the Cliff Temple statement of faith)

The world is steeped in disobedience and rebellion. We don't trust one another. We don't trust the image of God imprinted on the image of our bodies. We try to separate our inner self from our physical self and this is *Gnosticism*.

The early church decisively denounced Gnosticism and any heresies that arose from it. In the early church, there was a big debate about whether Jesus was fully God or fully man and they said: “yes, Jesus was both fully God and fully man.” So the integration of body and soul and Jesus's full humanity and full divinity is an essential Christian teaching.

We are all broken: sexually, relationally, morally. *All we like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way but the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:6) Our brokenness and rebellion has been put upon Christ who is making us new.

We are redeemed.

“We believe that the gospel is the power of God for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16).”

“We have been saved for the purpose of glorifying God and participating in the mission of God

to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 8:36). Because this is true, we can live as free people who are no longer slaves to our sins.” (Cliff Temple, Statement of Faith)

SLIDE: KINTSUGI POT

There is a Japanese art form called Kintsugi— Kintusgi is the art of repair. The art form embraces imperfection. It takes broken pieces and restores them and this art form is a beautiful depiction of our redemption in Christ, the restorer of the broken.

He is calling us from darkness to light and he’s calling us to abstain from the desires of our flesh that wage war against our soul. And these longings seeks to distract us from our true identity in Christ.

Christ is the healer of our wounds. We just need to give our wounds and our hurts to him for him to deal with— and like the artist that he is— not only will he heal our wounds— he will make our scars into something more a beautiful than we can ever imagine if we embrace our limits, embrace our unknowing, embrace our imperfections and allow them to be restored in the way that the creator first intended. “As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be,” says the old declaration often

uttered in some churches during worship after they read a psalm.

We are family.

We are family, we are a collection of living stones.

“God is gathering a family, one that would love one another and learn together how to love God with all of our hearts (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2; Ephesians 2:19-22). Because this is true, we can be assured of our place in the world, no longer afraid or alone.” (Cliff Temple Statement of Faith)

It’s an interesting thing scripturally when we are asked to consider what it means to be family. In Mark 10 and Matthew 19, Jesus is clear when he says of marriage that the two will become one flesh and what God has joined together let no one separate. So Jesus highly esteems the marriage relationship and presumably the family relationships that stem from the marriage relationship. But Jesus is after something more than just the nuclear, biological family.

In Mark 3 and Luke 8 when his mother and his brothers come looking for him— Jesus says, “who are my mother and my brother and my sisters? Anyone who does the will of God is my mother and my brother and my sisters.”

Jesus is building a great big family from all of these small families. Our bodies proclaim the gospel, our families proclaim the gospel and collectively we are being built into a bigger family that is depicted in this place but one day will defy all expectations as every nation tribe and tongue proclaims Jesus as Lord.

And to learn how to be family together is to learn how to serve one another.

We are servants.

“We are servants of the King (Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:5-8). Just as Jesus did not come into the world to be served, but to serve others, so now are we called to serve others rather than serving ourselves. Because this is true, we find our purpose in laying down our lives to serve others.” (Cliff Temple Statement of Faith)

But this is not about scrubbing floors. This is about learning how to see. This is how we live our lives so that those who malign us may see our honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

The serving first and foremost is serving one another. It’s as it says in Romans 12— *let us outdo one another in showing honor—*

Galatians 5—being slaves to one another—Ephesians 4—bearing with one another—keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Showing the world that it is not the church starts when we serve one another. In doing so, we help one another see and know our true identity in Christ. It means calling one another higher when we’re not living within the bounds set forth by God.

It starts with us, practicing together. We don’t go out and serve until we know how to serve each other. And serving family is a whole lot more difficult than serving someone we don’t know! But when we know how to serve those we’ve known for 50 years, serving the strangers in our midst becomes second nature.

In our service, we become priests to each other.

We are priests.

“God has made each person a priest, someone who can help others to connect with God in a deep and loving relationship (1 Peter 2:9). Because this is true, we are called to live holy (set-apart) lives,” to bring God’s kingdom, and to serve others (2 Corinthians 7:1).” (Cliff Temple Statement of Faith)

We are priests to each other.

The pandemic taught us a lot about different gestures and one of those is the elbow bump. So give one another an elbow bump and in so doing allow the person next to you to be the priest at your elbow. The priest at your elbow is an oft unexplored statement from the great reformer Martin Luther. It gets at the idea of the priesthood of every believer which recalls our understanding of the Holy Trinity—it's that divine choreography in community where we're serving one another, deferring to one another and, once again, it teaches us to see and embody the presence of God who is with us. *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.*

This is who we are.

The great preacher Carlyle Marney who for a time served as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Austin wrote a little book called *Priests to Each Other*.

And being a priest to each other is about being incarnational.

“Incarnation” he says “is our answer... the person is the self with the selves who created and called him out. This is Christian community. No human person who

wishes to be a person can any longer be individual. This is the meaning of Trinity—God in his social relations.

We are a people of priests— and a priest facilitates the presence— calls forth the presence of the triune God. We are not in charge—we point to the one who is.

And in this we are missionaries

We are missionaries.

“Each of us has a mission to fulfill and a people to reach (Romans 8:28). Some are called to go, while others are called to stay, but we are all called (John 20:21; Matthew 28:18-20). We all have different gifts that have been given according to what God calls us to do (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Because this is true, we work together to complement one another's gifts, and we seek to be faithful missionaries for Christ in the places where we live, work and play.” (Cliff Temple Statement of Faith)

I want us to walk away today with a clear understanding of what it means to be missionaries with the illustration of the church as a collection of living stones. All of us are essentially stones that, like a Kintsugi pot, are redeemed and reclaimed.

But we are better together. Sometimes I fear that we use this terminology of everyday missionaries and we see ourselves as lone rangers in our Monday-Saturday lives but this is not how we understand mission.

We are living stones, living demonstrations together at home and in the temple— looking for an linking up with persons of peace along the way.

As we said farewell to our community in Fredericksburg Virginia— the college students installed this work of art to depict the work of mission.

Image: FIG MOSIAC

It's a collection of tiles that had been colored and broken and fitted back together to tell a story of fig tree. In Luke 13, Jesus tells the story of the barren fig tree and the steward that wanted give it another year. Sometimes in our impatience with mission we want to cut down the very thing that the Lord wants to use to seed our mission.

But when we are patient and learn to serve one another, we make a mosaic that helps the world to see.

Sometimes I am asked what changes I want to make around here and while surely there have

been and will be some changes what I mainly want to do is to add fertilizer and water and more good soil to what is already here.

This tree will produce more fruit than we can imagine. The mosaic here shows that every fruit of the fig tree can bear as many as a thousand seeds.

Once we nurture the tree and see it bearing fruit— we begin to share it. The good news about figs is that they don't last long. Once they're ripe you've got to share them.

So as we demonstrate who we are together as the church in the world— let's keep learning to see all who are created in the image of God and although we are broken— if we call upon the name of Jesus we can be redeemed.

We learn how to talk— then we learn the rules and we learn it as family, as servants and as priests on mission together.

Amen.