

May 18, 2014  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

## Hope Because You Belong

1 Peter 2:4-10  
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*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Dear friends in Christ,

We are continuing our sermons series called “Hope.” Hope is a frequent topic in the Bible. The Bible tells us how much we need hope. So it offers us hope. It describes the blessings of hope. It explains what our hope is in. It leads us to rejoice in hope. So the big question we’ve been considering is this: Do you have hope?

Today, from God’s Word I pray that you will discover that you do indeed have hope... because you belong.

One thing I have noticed in my almost 20 years as a pastor is that one of the reasons people do not come to church is that they feel like they don’t belong. They may feel that they don’t fit the mold of a church person, so they don’t attend. Or maybe because of a particular sin, they avoid God... feeling they don’t belong in his presence, so they don’t come to his house. Some people feel they have to change their life first before they can start coming to church.

To feel like you don’t belong is a powerfully negative experience. To feel like you don’t belong in the family of God will certainly cause you to lose hope.

Can you remember experiences from your life when you felt you didn’t belong? For me, it was whenever I switched schools or jobs. Many of you know I attended Nebraska Lutheran High School. I distinctly remember my parents dropping me off. I didn’t know anyone but my older sister, and of course she didn’t acknowledge her freshman younger brother. My parents helped me move into the dorm room. In front of the boys dorm we said our goodbyes, and I watched them drive off in our 1978 Dodge van. And a sinking feeling came over me: now what? I didn’t yet feel like I belonged there. I didn’t feel like I had a place, or friends, or a purpose. It was a pretty hopeless feeling. That all change pretty quickly, but that initial feeling of not belonging stuck in my mind.

I remember feeling that way again when I started college... then when I started Seminary. But I especially felt it again when my wife and I first arrived in Russia. Our plane landed in the early morning hours when it was still dark out. Stepping out onto the tarmac, getting onto a rickty old bus to go to the terminal, standing out in “baggage claim” which looked more like an old cattle shed, then the drive on poorly lit, dirty roads, filled with potholes, looking out on a strange land, seeing drab concrete buildings... the overwhelming feeling I had was, “What am I doing here? I do not belong here.”

Should we feel the same way as a follower of Jesus? Do we really belong in God’s family? Do we really belong in Christ’ church? Do we really belong in his eternal presence? If you feel like you don’t belong, you won’t have hope.

So let’s take a look at 1 Peter 2:4-10. I mentioned last week that Peter doesn’t really follow an easy-to-outline form. Let’s read all of the verses and then circle back and unpack the big ideas here. As I read, answer the question: Do you belong? Because if you belong, then you have hope.

**1 Peter 2:4-10 (NIV84)**

**4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—**

**5 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.**

**6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”**

**7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”**

**8 and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.**

**9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

**10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

If you don't belong, then you don't have hope. How do you know you belong with God, and in his kingdom? Two main things: You belong because you are in Christ Jesus. You have proof that you belong because of all the privileges that are yours.

Kind of like when you go to Sam's Club. You don't belong there unless you have a membership. And because you have a membership, you have privilege of being able to shop there and get discounted items. So what is your membership card in God's kingdom? What privileges are yours?

1) Your membership card is Jesus Christ himself.

- a. I believe the reason most people struggle with a feeling of belonging in God's family is because deep down inside, they know they're not worthy. Maybe you've felt that way before. You know your sin. You know the things you've done. You know your past. You know the wrong thoughts that pass through your head. You know the ways you waste money. You know the relationships you choose not to work on, even though you know you should. You know what more you could be doing for your family, for God, for your neighbor... but you choose not to.

So you struggle with this feeling of belonging, don't you? You know you don't belong in the family of God. You don't belong in the presence of God. You don't deserve his acceptance, love or favor. And therefore, you sometimes struggle to have hope.

- b. But here's the things. Christ Jesus himself is your membership card in God's club. With Christ Jesus, you become a full-fledged member of the kingdom of God.
- c. Here's how our text says it: **“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him.”** When Jesus is called a “living Stone” the context indicates the kind of stone used for building. **“For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”** **7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”**

So Jesus is identified as a living stone, a cornerstone and a capstone... all stones used for building. In other words, Jesus is the first and most important stone in a structure that is being built. In the context we will see that the structure is the Church, and it is made up of every believer.

That Jesus is a living Stone. A stone is something solid... something you can build on. Yet there is a paradox in that when you think of a stone, you think of something lifeless. We have the phrase, "Stone, cold dead." But Jesus is a living stone. We dare not think that he lived and died and that on his legacy the church is built. No, he lived, died and rose again. And on the living stone is the church built!

He's also called the cornerstone. In building stone buildings back then, the started with the cornerstone. It was carefully hune, square plumb and true. It was carefully placed first, and then the walls were built straight out from it on each side. The walls were built up straight based on that cornerstone as well. Jesus is the cornerstone for his church... for us who belong.

He is also called the capstone: the capstone was the one at was placed on the top of the arch. To build an arch, scaffolding must hold every rock in place... until the capstone is placed at the top center. Then all supporting scaffolding can be removed. The arch supports itself with the capstone in place.

- d. He is the living stone, the cornerstone, the capstone. He is a solid rock, a perfect building stone on which God builds his church. He is perfect for this because he is in fact perfect. Exactly to the standards and measurements God requires! He fulfilled the Father's plan perfectly in taking the imperfections of you and me... all our sin... and dying on the cross for us. But he is not a dead stone, he is a living stone.
- e. But why speak of him as a "stone" at all? Because Peter is describing a building. Jesus is not alone. There is a building built upon this living Stone, and it is Christ's Church. And that church is made up of many others... you and me and all who come to the living Stone and believe in him. We rest upon him the living stone and we are built together as stones into a massive church. So because you have come to Christ, you do belong!
- f. But not all belong! Some have rejected Jesus as the living stone, the cornerstone, the capstone. They have judged him unworthy, unsuitable. They have rejected him, and so are not built into his structure, the church. They do not belong. That many, starting in Jesus' own day, rejected him does not mean he was an imperfect stone. Their judgment of him does not change who he is. In fact, by judging him they in fact judge themselves.

ILLUSTRATION: A couple of men walk into the Louvre art museum in Paris. They stand before a world renowned and acclaimed painting, and one says to the other: "I don't think much of that painting." The curator overheard them and said, "Sir, the world has already assessed the quality of that painting and found it to be unequalled. You have only demonstrated that your measuring capability is faulty."

Those who reject Jesus demonstrate the same. Jesus is not on trial. He was chosen by God to be the Savior of the world, and he completed what the Father gave him to do perfectly. Yet some reject. And whoever rejects Jesus rejects God's salvation. Whoever rejects Jesus does not have the perfection of Christ. Is still in their sin, an DOES NOT BELONG. Apart from Jesus we cannot belong to God and his family. In Christ Jesus, you do belong to God and his family.

TRANSITION: Now, when you belong somewhere, you have privileges. The privileges are proof that you belong. Buying discount items is a privilege only Sam's Club members get. Being a member at country club means you have privileges non-members do not enjoy. Membership at the Children's Museum or Zoo grant you access that others do not have.

So what privileges do you have because you belong to God, his family and his kingdom? Our text mentions several! And they are the proof that you belong.

- 2) Proof you belong: you have privileges! Are you aware of all these privileges? The better you know them, the more you are assured that you belong, and the more hope that you will have.
  - a. Because you have come to Christ and have union with Christ, you have **access to God**. With Christ, with sins forgiven, adopted into God's family, as a stone built into Christ's Church, you have access. God dwells within his church. The Holy Spirit dwells within you. Christ is in you, and you are in Christ. And so you have access to the living God!
  - b. Security. **"The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."** Never is a key word! Not now, not ever. Can you imagine how impossible it would be to take a single rock out of a stone wall. The entire wall is built around it, and that unique rock is formed to all the rest so it is a permanent part of it. You have security in knowing you are a child of God *and always will be*.
  - c. Chosen by God. Verse 9 says, **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."** God chose you to be his own. He set you apart for special service to him. (Obey the message),
  - d. PRIESTS with a purpose: **"A spiritual house, a holy priesthood. You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation."** In the New Testament all believers have the privilege of serving God as priests. What characterized the Old Testament priests? They were chosen by God. They were cleansed by God. They were set apart for special service to God. They were anointed and specially gifted by God for that service. They were God's spokesmen and servants. They served according to God's instructions, obeying his commands. They sacrificed offerings. You offer your body as a living sacrifice. They prayed on behalf of the people... so do you.

You have the privilege of being a priest of God! You belong!
  - e. Purpose: Your purpose is summarized in these words: **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** You been called out of darkness, you have seen the light... for what purpose? To declare his praises.

Can you imagine how your sense of belong and hope would increase if every day you would just ask this one question: **Through my words and actions today, how will I declare his praises?**

CONCLUSION: Friends, if you are to have hope, you must know that we belong... that you belong to God, his family, his kingdom. You need to know that you are his now, and that you will be his in eternity. Peter has assured you today that you do indeed belong! You belong because you are in Christ Jesus. You have proof that you belong because of all the privileges that are yours: union with Christ. Security. Chosen by God. Priests with a purpose. Go today with hope in the living Stone. You belong!