

[Link to Sunday 10:25 AM Service](#)
via Facebook: [First Christian Church Decatur](#)

“Introducing Who We Are and Who We’re Becoming”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 26, 2022

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: 1 Peter 2:2-10

1 Peter 2:2-10

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 Jesus, a living stone, although rejected by humanity yet chosen and precious to God, 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 that stone will not be put to shame.”

⁷ To you then who believe, a precious honor; but for those who do not believe,
“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone,”

⁸ and
“A stumbling stone,
and a rock of offence.”

They stumble over the word *disobeying, disobedient* by design.

⁹ Yet you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own possession, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people,
yet now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
yet now you have received mercy.

“Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”

They say some very young disciples
were caught stealing cherries
from the cherry tree in the backyard
of a deacon in the church.

“Do you know what the Bible says about thieves?” asked the deacon.

“Yes, ma’am,” said one of the children.

“Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

Far from perfect, far from sainthood,
we gather together in this sacred space
and recall our beloved Minnie Dozier Haynes' wisdom: *“Pobody’s nerfect.”*

Imperfect, humble, hopeful,
we give thanks that God’s Big Love calls us into community,
to know that we all belong here, at the Lord’s Table,
here the fellowship of the whole people of God,
that saints and sinners like us
are to be and share the Good News

We belong – just as we are -- in God’s spiritual house.

“Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”

This summer we are thrilled to be offering, exploring, discovering
the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

We’ll move and grow together,
exegeting the history and polity of the church.
We’ll explore how we serve in the wider community and practice the Faith,
We’ll examine the core teachings on mission, baptism and holy communion.
We’ll expand the place of the Bible in our daily walk with God.

You see, *“We are people of the Book.”*

That’s what Alexander Campbell called us to be and share.
He said we are people of the Book, meaning the Good Book, the Holy Bible.

Alexander Campbell,
one of the founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
--and far and away the most prolific--
was a teacher and preacher of great influence and vision.

In 1839, Alexander Campbell addressed
why someone might read the Bible in the first place:

“The [follower] of God reads the Book of God to commune with God,” he said,
‘to feel after [God],
and find [God],’
to feel [God’s] power and divinity stirring within...
to have [one’s] soul fired, quickened, animated
by the spirit of grace and truth.
[One] reads the Bible
to enjoy the God of the Bible.”

We read the Bible to enjoy the God of the Bible.
We seek after divine wisdom
to enjoy, emote, engage with the Holy Spirit.
Let’s put it another way:
some folks like to talk about God;
here we prefer to talk with God.

We’re all about communing with the holy,
with a God of Big Love and Great Hope!
The Faith emanates from within, from the heart,
with the Bible feeding our experience of trust in God.

Still in conversation about the Word, the Bible,
Alexander Campbell affirmed that
we meet God at the intersection of faith and reason.
Draw deep upon reason, scientific research, raw intelligence.
Dig deep into your capacity for logic that God instills and cultivates.

“...This warm stirring [that Campbell affirmed]
was not merely a matter of warm feelings.” [\[1\]](#)

Campbell read much by thinkers,
Christian and otherwise,
who emphasized the life of the mind and the search for truth.
Campbell taught [us] to read the Bible
through the lens of ... scientific method...
Campbell ... argued that “the Bible is a book of facts.”

If you could use scientific methods on the facts of nature,
then you could use them on the facts of Scripture.

"When I at last took the naked text," said Campbell,
"and read it with common sense,
the Bible became a new book to me."

Let the Word inspire and inform us
into newness, into new beginnings,
into ever deepening relationships with God and one another.

Someone once complained to Mark Twain
that the Bible was all jumbled up, inconsistent,
and filled with passages he could not understand.
"I have more difficulty with the passages I do understand," said Mark Twain,
"than with the passages I do not understand."

Any introduction
to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination,
a divine manifestation of light and love,
starts with God.

Any introduction
of the congregation of First Christian Church of Decatur,
a significant church that impacts our community and city,
starts with God.

Our genesis is grounded in God,
whose Word and will, law and love, nature and nurture
call us to become a spiritual house, a faith community,
a Christ-centered movement of wholeness in a fragmented world.

Remember, Christianity is not a religion
as much as a relationship.

Our relationship with God and one another begins with
"...letting ourselves be built into a spiritual house"

"All people," said Alexander Campbell, *"deserve a fresh hearing of the Gospel,"*

Come to think of it,
more fresh hearings, more diverse interpretations lead to more conversations.

Sharing conversations that matter
are a formula for building community,
which is the cure we so deeply crave.

As disparate in thought and mind as we are,
so, too, is the Bible remarkably, wonderfully diverse.

It is as widely diverse in its theologies of God
as the east is from the west.

A key component of our spiritual formation is that we are interconnected.
This is the essence of God's beloved community.

God creates a single spiritual household,
one built on the cornerstone that Love Incarnate,
fills it to overflowing with the Holy Spirit,
and invites all of us to belong.

Ponder on this:

- Who has modeled for you the essence of Christian community?
- Who has helped you to build a spiritual household?
- Is there someone in your sphere of influence
with whom you'd like to share the blessings of your faith community?

"Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house"

Consider God's Word for a hungry and thirsty and worthy world.

*Like newborn infants long for the pure, spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow into salvation—
if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

*Come to Jesus, a living stone,
although rejected by humanity
yet chosen and precious to God,
and 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.*

First Peter is a missive of hope delivered to Christians,
particularly Christians who are isolated, suffering, set apart,
displaced, dispossessed, disoriented,
bright folks suddenly unsure,
unsure of the future or what it holds for them.

Like us, these were a people seeking to be faithful
in the midst of terrible suffering
yet holding fast to a deep and abiding faith.

Sound familiar?

God spoke to our spiritual forebearers.

God is still speaking.

We are listening.

Our ears and hearts and minds are wide open.

The Word of God speaks to us, delivering a word of hope

This is a remarkable yet often misunderstood passage of scripture.

We tend to focus too much on being royal priests
and not enough on belonging to God.

We find this often appears in discussions of the priesthood of all believers...

However, in this context, of First Peter,
this passage introduces the notion of a "household of God." [\[1\]](#)

"Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house."

[Also translated: ***"You yourselves are being built into a spiritual house."***]

First step: Be built into a spiritual house,
then -- and only then -- the Spirit may make of you a holy priesthood.

The biblical author underscores the importance of this motif,
the idea of the unity of believers in a single household. [\[2\]](#)

Understanding Jesus Christ as the living stone,
believers are to see themselves as living stones, as well,
living stones whom God builds into a single, spiritual house. [\[3\]](#)

While such stones may be rejected or ignored or cast aside
by the world at large,
these living stones will be affirmed by God,
living souls chosen and precious,
called to become one community,
one people, a royal priesthood.

If it wasn't for this spiritual household,
we might never have known Isabelle Herbig.
Isabelle Herbig was a saint in our midst.
She was gentle, wise and witty.
When she was 93 years young,
she shared with us what she overheard in her backyard.
Her next-door neighbor was entertaining her grandson.
The boy said, "Grandma, do you still go to church school?"
She said, "Yes, I do."
"Gee, Grandma, I thought you would have learned it all by now!"

We have much to learn, and much to share.

"Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house"

Listen, First Peter insists:

these terms serve to underscore the collective nature of the community.

The Greek word for community is koinonia.

Fellowship.

Communion.

Sharing in common.

Spiritual household.

“Koinonia is a Greek word that occurs 20 times in the Bible.

Translated as fellowship, the first occurrence of koinonia is Acts 2:42:

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

Christian fellowship is a key aspect of the Christian life.

Followers of Jesus Christ are to gather together, serve together,
commune together in love, faith, and encouragement.

The Good News is that the author of First Peter recognizes
that sometimes, oftentimes, in these times,

God's people are experiencing collective trauma;
we suffer; we are displaced and isolated;
we may feel more disconnected than connected.

So, the Good News is that God's builds a single spiritual household
in which we are nurtured and nurture one another.

God created a spiritual village,

one in which we encourage and lift each other up.

We are now a household created by God, built on Christ,
filled with the Spirit...and you and you and you.

*“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.”*

In Philippians 2:1-2, the Apostle Paul declares:

*“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,
then make my joy complete by being like-minded,
having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”*

Our koinonia with each other

has its genesis in our common koinonia with Jesus Christ.”[\[4\]](#)

Think about it:

Thanks to the grace of God, healing happens in community.

In community, we discover our connection to God and one another.

Mercy and justice are made real in the context of community.

And when justice is not done, when justice is denied, we the community know it.

May we learn to love one another more than we worship at the idol of fear,

Let’s learn to see each other as a child of God,

for *“once we were no people, but now we are God’s people.”*

“Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”

First Peter affirms that our social identity

is grounded in being a spiritual household.[\[6\]](#)

In Christ, God creates a place for those who have none

Once you were no people; now you are God’s people.

Here in the Church you have a name, an identity, a place at the Table.

Here in this spiritual household of Disciples of Christ

you shall taste and see that the Lord is good.

First Peter affirms that the spiritual household

is linked with Jesus Christ, forever.[\[7\]](#)

Our spiritual house is not a social club.

We do not exist solely for the needs and wants and interests of our members.

We are not a museum of saints.

We are a hospital for sinners.

We are a reverent people

acknowledging God as the head

and Christ as the cornerstone, Love Incarnate.

We are here by virtue of God’s mercy

. . . God’s mercy and nothing else.

First Peter affirms that all who belong to the spiritual household

have a new standing.[\[8\]](#)

No longer are we outcasts or rejects, displaced or dispossessed.

In Christ all are invited to belong,

and by belonging you and I are “chosen and precious in God’s sight.”

“Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”

What binds us together as Disciples of Christ
is our belonging to God and belief in Jesus Christ.
We're not bound together by structure or by creed.
We are bound by a covenantal relationship,
a loving relationship that has its genesis in God,
its beginning in God,
and continues in the revelation of God in Christ.
We belong together because we seek, follow, revere the Love of God in Christ.

We are living stones
living the faith intensely.
As living stones who belong,
who are chosen,
who are built by God into a spiritual household
with Christ as the cornerstone,
we call ourselves Disciples of Christ.

A story tells of one General Assembly of the Christian Church
when three former General Ministers and Presidents
argued outside the assembly hall.
Their voices were raised.
Their fingers jabbed at one another.
They fused and fumed right up until
it was time for worship to begin.
Then, arm in arm,
they walked in to partake of Holy Communion.

This is how Disciples of Christ belong, behave, and believe.
This is who and whose we are.

We are passionate and faithful,
engaged in the community and enthusiastic about building relationships,
present in the world and prayerful in the Holy Spirit.
Imperfect, flawed, saints and sinners yoked in the God's spiritual house,
we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

We embody undying hope and optimism.
We love God and one another.
We are united in our diversity.
We agree to differ.
And then, and then, we link arms,
pass around communion and smiles,
all the while sharing the Cup of Life as we break Bread together.

This is a sacred way of being.

Christianity is not a religion

-- it's a relationship.

The Church is more than any building

– it is a movement.

The Body of Christ is not closed

– all are welcomed home in this spiritual household.

You, me, we all belong

– not because we want to know more about God –
we belong because we want more God.

Is this truly the case?

Do you really want more God in your life?

More love in your community?

More mercy and justice in your world?

Then let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] Beverly Gaventa, et al, Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A. Westminster John Knox Press. 1995. P. 295.

[2] Gaventa. P. 295.

[3] Gaventa, P. 296

[4] “Koinonia” God Questions? Website: <https://www.gotquestions.org/koinonia.html>

[6] Gaventa. P. 296.

[7] Gaventa. P. 296.

[8] Gaventa. P. 296.