Hi,

Today’s update:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

***Peter 2:1-10 (NRSV)***

**Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 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 him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, 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. 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.”**

**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,” 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.**

**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.**

**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.**

A letter of encouragement in tough times. That’s 1 Peter, written to believers in Asia Minor who live on “the margins of respectable society” and who have “become victims of social ostracism, their allegiance to Christ having won for them slander, animosity, reproach, scorn, vilification, and contempt,” as Achtemeier et al describe it. These Christians are paying a steep social, economic, and personal price for placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

What sort of letter would you write? What would you say to them?

Peter begins his letter by reminding them of God’s great mercy. The believers have been given “a new birth into a living hope” and “into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” The joy of salvation is theirs, Peter writes.

Then, Peter urges them to live disciplined and holy lives, perhaps knowing that in times of stress, anxiety, and fear it is often God who goes first, pushed aside by the crises of the moment.

In today’s passage, Peter calls on these believers to long for spiritual nourishment and embrace their new identity as God’s chosen and holy people, knowing always *why* God has called them to his family.

*God’s people, a holy people*

Peter writes to Christians who feel like aliens and exiles in their own lands. Echoing God’s word brought by Moses, Peter encourages them by reminding them of their place among God’s people. Like the ancient Israelites, these Christians *are* a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation” upon whom worldly power and holy purpose converge. They have been called out of the darkness for a reason, a purpose. Peter states this purpose simply: Christians are to proclaim God’s mighty acts.

What kind of people does it take to proclaim God’s mighty acts, to build for God’s kingdom?

Eugene Boring identifies five imperatives for the believers in Peter’s first and second chapters. They are to:

1. live in the *hope* of Christ’s return,

2. be *holy*, living a life set apart for God’s service,

3. *live in reverent fear* of God, rather than living for the oppressive culture in which they find themselves, (Living in reverent fear of God means to live always aware that God is God, that there is an aspect of God’s holiness that lies beyond rationality and morality.)

4. *love*, which is the unselfish caring for others, and

5. *long for* spiritual nourishment so that they might *grow*.

These are people well-equipped to “proclaim God’s mighty acts.”

Peter tells the Christians that they are to rid themselves of all malice and pretense, envy and hurtful talk. Like babies at their mothers’ breasts, these Christians are to drink the milk of God’s kindness so that they might grow to maturity and wholeness, having received a foretaste of God’s full mercy. Peter urges them to be like “living stones” built into a spiritual house, a house of strength that rests upon Jesus Christ, the cornerstone and foundation of this house. Peter writes, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you . . . love one another deeply from the heart” (1:13,22). Later in the letter Peter writes, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received . . . whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies . . .” (4:10-11).

In much of his letter, Peter paints a picture of a people, God’s people, who can do the work of the kingdom, who can “proclaim God’s mighty acts.” Christians are to be unified and disciplined. We are to love one another. We are to serve one another. Peter reminds us that we are to be agreeable, sympathetic, and humble. We are not to retaliate when wronged. . . . And we are to remember that we are part of something big!

*Something Big*

Read through any company’s annual reports over the years and you’ll find a common theme. Every year is “momentous” and “without precedent.” Every year, according to the reports, management is faced with difficulties and challenges that have never been seen before. Listen to politicians and pundits. Even theologians and teachers. It seems that we always want to believe that we live in momentous times, perhaps the most important period in our nation’s, or company’s, or church’s history. Why? Why is it so important for us to believe we face challenges greater than anyone has faced before us?

It is because we all want to be part of something big. We want to be part of something that transcends the ordinariness of our daily lives. We need to believe that our lives and our work really matter. Thus, it is all the more odd that many Christians so easily marginalize “church.” Church becomes a place to see friends for a while on Sunday morning, or a place where we come to learn a little more about how to be nice or how to be happy, or a place to which we turn in tough times – but certainly nothing BIG.

But in today’s passage, Peter blows out of the water all attempts to marginalize church and faith. Christians, he writes, are a community chosen and formed by God so that we might proclaim God to the world, so that all those who are blind to God’s “mighty acts” might see the truth.

Read the closing verses of today’s passage. If Peter’s words don’t make your heart race at least a bit, then perhaps you’ve yet to experience the passion and even the sense of purpose that ought to mark believers. Why should we be passionate? So that we may effectively proclaim God to the world in what we say and in what we do – in who we are.

We are living through tough times, albeit much more so for some than for others, but all of us feel the isolation and anxieties. Peter wrote to encourage Christians who were being persecuted and shunned. He sought to strengthen their resolve by reminding them of their true identities. They were the people of God, God’s colonists as it were, who would never be abandoned by God and whose purpose could never be diminished. We are no less the people of God, chosen for a purpose larger than ourselves.

God has bestowed a great mercy on us, calling us to him and to his purposes. We at St. Andrew must never pull back in the face of tough times, but always push forward. We must strive to hear God’s voice and let him lead us with renewed purpose. Like those believers long ago, we can hear Peter calling us to be a people of deep faith pursuing a holy purpose with love, joy, discipline, humility, and courage so that we may extend to others the mercy that God has extended to us.

*A bit more -- “A living stone . . . like living stones”*

In 1 Peter 2, from which today’s passage was drawn, Peter piles image upon image, metaphor upon metaphor. Peter begins by comparing the Christians to newborn infants who need “pure, spiritual milk” to grow up. What is that milk? Jesus, of course.

Then, Peter urges the Christians to come to Jesus, a “living stone.” This stone has been evaluated by the world and found wanting, rejected and tossed aside. But, in truth, this living stone is precious beyond measure, chosen by God for God’s purposes. Too much of the world is simply wrong about Jesus.

And as Jesus is the living stone, so are Christians “like living stones.” We participate in the life of Christ. We are called to the imitation of Christ. Earlier in the letter, Peter quotes from Leviticus: “You shall be holy, as I am holy.” We, like living stones, are being built into a house, a “spiritual house,” of which Jesus is the cornerstone (v. 6). Those who reject the cornerstone stumble and fall, but those who respond in obedient faith are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood.”

In his commentary on 1 Peter, David Bartlett writes, “the difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that we see different things, but that we see the same things differently. Those who believe and those who do not both see Jesus Christ, the rock. For believers, that rock is the cornerstone or the capstone of their lives as individuals and in community. For unbelievers, that rock is simply to be rejected. What makes the difference between the two ways of seeing is faith.”

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott