

**Building the House of Love:  
CLAIMING YOUR IDENTITY**

**I Peter 2:2-10**

*Who will inhabit the house of love?*

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Eleven miles off the east coast of Scotland, in the turbulent North Sea, there is about an acre of rock that lies just below the surface of the ocean. It is called Bell Rock, and for four hours a day, at low tide, the rock is exposed. The rest of the time it is underwater—just barely. It's very dangerous for passing ships. In 1811, an engineering firm took on the challenge of building a lighthouse on the rock to warn ships where it was. The problem was, the workers only had four hours a day to chip away at the rock to build the foundation of a lighthouse that could withstand the violent storms of the North Sea. But that's exactly what they did, and once the foundation was set, they could build the rest of the 115-foot tall lighthouse. The Bell Rock lighthouse is still in use today, over 200 years later.<sup>1</sup>

Like the Bell Rock lighthouse, we sometimes have a window of opportunity in which we can build our spiritual lives. There are seasons when the storms are raging, and it's all we can do just to hold on and weather it out. We're in a season like that right now, don't you think? But even now, God gives us a chance to build on the rock, to establish our faith more securely, to strengthen our hope, and to claim his promises. The challenge is to make the most of these opportunities when they come, because the storms will come and go and come again, and we will need a solid foundation to stand on, no matter the season.

This Easter season we are talking about moving from the house of fear into the house of love. So far we have founded the house of love on hope. We have built the walls of the house of love with holiness. Today we want to talk about who inhabits the house of love. Of course, *we* want to live in the house of love. The writer of I Peter encourages us to be a part of it: "*like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.*"<sup>2</sup>

The One who makes it a house of love is Jesus. He is the Spirit of love in the house. His presence makes the difference between a house of fear and a house of love. So we want him to inhabit the house as well.

I Peter talks about Christ as the Cornerstone of the spiritual house: "*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight. ...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.'*"<sup>3</sup>

The cornerstone, in ancient construction, was the stone placed on the foundation that tied two walls together. It gave the building or the house stability and security. In today's construction methods, cornerstones are mostly ceremonial, but they are still very important.

Jesus is the most important stone in our spiritual house. He's the Lord of the Universe and the Head of the Church, and he achieved this status through his death and resurrection.

The world doesn't get this. In the house of fear, this makes no sense. Paul writes to the Corinthians, *"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*<sup>4</sup>

To people of faith, Jesus is the most precious thing in the world, the greatest treasure of all. Our Scripture says, *"To you then who believe, he is precious."*<sup>5</sup> We recognize his value.

Finding Jesus is like a gem dealer I read about who was strolling the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show out in Arizona. Suddenly he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10.

The gem dealer bought it and has since had it certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the second-largest stone of its kind. Its appraised value? \$2.28 million!<sup>6</sup>

The world may not see the value of Jesus, but we know how precious he is. We want him to inhabit our house. We want a relationship with the living Christ. And this is so easy to accomplish. All you have to do is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God whom God raised from the dead. Then confess your sins to God, and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. Ask him to take control and lead your life. And promise to follow him to the best of your ability from this point forward. That's it—simple, straightforward—even a child can make sense out of that.

Once we enter into a relationship with Christ, it becomes a mutual proposition. We want him to live in our spiritual house, and we want to live in his spiritual house. We want to move into the house of love. Our identity becomes connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. We are who we are because of whose we are: “*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.*”<sup>7</sup> We are who we are because of whose we are. We are connected to the King. We are spiritual royalty.

In his book *Leaving Home*, Garrison Keillor tells a fictional story about a family from Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. Grace Tollefson married Alexander Campbell back in the 1930s, a man who turned out to be worthless. They had three kids—Earl, Marlys, and Walter. One day Alex left Grace and the kids. Penniless, she was forced to move back home to Lake Wobegon to live off the kindness and charity of folks there. It was humiliating.

But one day they got a letter from a man in Philadelphia doing research on Scottish nobility. He asked who their ancestors were so he could look them up. Grace wrote the man back, and a few days later another letter came in the mail. Though the envelope was addressed to Mrs. Grace Campbell, the letter was addressed to "Your Royal Highness." In the letter the man wrote: "Today is the happiest day of my life as I greet my one true Sovereign Queen." He went on to say that their branch of the Campbell family was first in the line of succession of the House of Stewart, the Royal Family of Scotland. Keillor writes:

[The line on the chart led] right straight to them: Earl, Marlys, and Walter. The Royal Family of Scotland living in Lake Wobegon in a green mobile home, furniture donated by the Lutheran church.

They were astounded beyond words. Disbelieving at first, afraid to put their weight on something so beautiful, afraid it was too good to be true, and then it took hold—this was grace, pure grace that God offered them. Not their will but His. Grace. Here they were in their same dismal place

but everything had changed. They were different people. Their surroundings were the same, but they were different.

Years later, the youngest son, Walter, found out the whole business was a fraud. But he never told his mother or siblings, because thinking you are royalty, whether anyone else knows it or not, changes a person. At the end of the story, Grace was much older, and she said to her son: “Oh, Walter, what would I do without you? You're so strong. You're so good to me. You're a prince, you know. They can put a crown on a dog and call it a prince, but you are a prince through and through. They may not know it now, but they'll know it soon. Next year we'll be in Edinburgh with the bands playing and the flags flying and the crowds cheering.”<sup>8</sup>

Whenever we gather as the community of faith, we are among unrecognized royalty. The difference is, this is no pipe dream. This is no fraud; it is true! We are descended from the King; we are princes and princesses—“*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.*” Once we realize that, even if our surroundings do not change, everything is different. We are living in the house of love.

The house of love is the community of Jesus. We are a colony of Christians, an outpost of holiness in a hostile, sinful culture. We have to stick together! John Wesley once said that the Scripture knows nothing of a “solitary religion.” Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*”<sup>9</sup> We are the living stones that make up the spiritual temple of God.

We are the community of Jesus, children of the resurrection. We live in the big house of love—founded on hope, walled by holiness, inhabited by Christ, identified as God's own people. When the storms of life come, we are ready, because we are built on that rock. Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew with this analogy: “*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that*

*house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”*<sup>10</sup> You can build your spiritual house on the rock of Jesus Christ, and when the storms of life come—death, disease, anxiety, loneliness, pandemic, economic hardship—you will stand.

Finally, the house of love—founded on hope, walled by holiness, inhabited by Christ, our spiritual home—has a purpose. It’s right there in our Scripture text: “*in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”<sup>11</sup> We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people. Once we were not a people; now we are the community of Jesus. Once we had not received mercy; now we live in his mercy day by day.

Therefore, we have good news to share. We have a gospel to proclaim. In the words of the Easter hymn, “We serve a risen Savior; he’s in the world today!”<sup>12</sup> This Savior has brought us out of the darkness into the marvelous light; we want to tell the world about him!

That is a picture of the people of God—built on the rock, shining the light, like a lighthouse in the storm. There is a storm raging around us, but maybe the storm is precisely what gives us the opportunity to shine. As we prepare to share in the Lord’s Supper today—a few of us here at church, most of you sharing in your home, by yourself or with your family—consider this possibility. Maybe this crazy time in the world is a God-given opportunity to become the person God created you to be. Maybe this is your window of opportunity to establish your foundation firmly on the rock of Jesus Christ. Maybe this is your moment to claim your God-given identity, your hidden royalty. Maybe today you move from the house of fear into the house of love.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://claymore.wisemagic.com/scotradiance/light/light08.htm>; [www.bellrock.org.uk/](http://www.bellrock.org.uk/)

<sup>2</sup> I Peter 2:5.

<sup>3</sup> I Peter 2:4, 6.

<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 1:18, 22-24.

<sup>5</sup> I Peter 2:7.

<sup>6</sup> Wanda Vassallo, *Leadership*, Vol. 17, no. 1.

<sup>7</sup> I Peter 2:9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Garrison Keillor, *Leaving Home* (New York: Viking, 1987), pp. 140-141, 145.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:19-22.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:24-27.

<sup>11</sup> I Peter 2:9b.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred H. Ackley, "He Lives," *United Methodist Hymnal*, #310.