

05.03.26 ~ Easter 5 + Communion

“A Holy Priesthood?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Comfort

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 ^{NKJV}

Pew Bible 479, 480

¹ In You, O Lord, I put my trust;
Let me never be ashamed;
Deliver me in Your righteousness.

² Bow down Your ear to me,
Deliver me speedily;
Be my rock of refuge,
A fortress of defense to save me.

³ For You *are* my rock and my fortress;
Therefore, for Your name's sake,
Lead me and guide me.

⁴ Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,
For You *are* my strength.

⁵ Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

¹⁵ My times *are* in Your hand;
Deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
And from those who persecute me.

¹⁶ Make Your face shine upon Your servant;
Save me for Your mercies' sake.

Leader: These Are God's Words of Comfort.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Conviction

1 Peter 2:2-10 ^{NKJV}

Pew Bible 1058

² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,
³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

The Chosen Stone and His Chosen People

⁴ Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by
God *and* precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a
holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus
Christ. ⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient,
“The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone,”

⁸ and

“A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.
⁹ But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Leader: These Are Words of Commitment.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God, you are the comforter, encourager, and provider of all that we need. We proclaim it because Christ is risen and present in our lives. Through his sacrifice, we have freedom from all sin. Because of your gift, we worship here today and ask that you inspire and teach us from your word to be the people you desire us to be. May we take our refuge in you and not earthly comforts. May we live obedient lives with you at the center of all our decisions. Open our hearts and minds to your guidance and direction, as you speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Have you ever read your Bible for strength or comfort, heard God's voice choosing you for some special calling or way to serve, but then thought or maybe even said out loud to him, “What? Who, me? No way am I equipped!” If we are honest Christians, that has probably happened to us more than once or twice. Although we are baptized and attending church, or even leading a church, like the psalmist David, we may have occasional questions, lapses in judgment, or critics that make us think we are not worthy or holy enough to be his representatives in this world. And that is OK! As long as we stay in the word of God and surround ourselves with the body of Christ through the people of God who encourage us, teach us, and hold us accountable.

Each year on the first Friday of May, the Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry gather to celebrate, empower, learn, encourage one another, and associate. The lunch is called FEAST! It is always a feast of worship,

communion, Scripture, teachings, prayer, creativity, lunch, and this year more connecting regionally and by roles of ministry. This group was started in 1988, four years after the Southern Baptist Convention challenged all women in church leadership. Several alternative associations were formed in response to the 1984 decision. On Friday, at Richmond's First Baptist Church on Monument Avenue, several male allies and pastors attended this year for support, plus one of the three living founders of VBWIM (five originally). Being on the Board of Directors has strengthened my own ministry as I am able to mentor younger women just getting into the ministry and they are teaching me how to use new methods, technology, and understand this generation's needs. We share resources, education, and experience to remind us we are not alone in our leadership; these connections broaden our church's reputation (for local referrals) and make me a better pastor for you. The guys have had groups like this for decades!

Today we read another psalm of David that he wrote when he was in great need. He was despised and persecuted yet loved the Lord and trusted him to protect him from his foes. "Come quickly to my rescue, Lord" he cries out yet affirms that God was his rock and deliverer in this lament poem. David's confidence came from his commitment to the Lord and God's love for him. Though he suffered persecution from Saul and faced possible death, he knew God would lead him through and out of danger. His obedience and devotion to God would save him and destroy his enemies. Do you have such confidence today? We may not have the life-threatening personal situations David did, but we all have anxiety over violence in our streets, the war in Iran, and the rising cost of living.

As I often do, I encourage you to read the Psalms for strength and comfort in these difficult times.

Our second passage is from 1 Peter, and the author identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). Surely this is a reference to Simon Peter, the spokesman for Jesus' disciples in all of the Gospels, but further texts indicate he wrote with the secretarial help of Silas (a variant of the Gk. "*Silvanus*"). The recipients of this letter were believers in several Christian communities throughout Asia Minor. These believers were mostly Gentile in background, living among non-believers, idolators, and heathens. They were also considered refugees or strangers, aliens in a foreign land, and as such, were criticized or singled out and faced much derision and bullying. Their socio-political climate was difficult since they could not vote and were ruled by unreasonable leaders. *The Interpreters' Bible* says that Peter warns these baby Christians that living in an evil, deceitful world is not easy. They must mature to their salvation. And like David's psalm, this letter is to strengthen them and convict them that the conflicts are worth it because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for them. Let's dissect the passage.

Like Peter's readers and listeners, as the newly converted, we start with mother's milk and that works for a little while, but as we grow in Christ, other powers and principalities challenge our beliefs, so we must ingest the "bread" of Christ through his word and spirit, and chew on the "meat" of his teachings and parables. Only this spiritual diet will sustain you and fortify you in the face of sin, temptation, or conflict. Salvation, though a free gift of God's grace, still requires discipline, consistent study, and worship.

Peter's words in verses 4-10 are for the church and its congregants. As we recalled last week during our Anniversary recognition, Christ is the cornerstone of our faith and this church! Precious and strong is the cornerstone used in any building at its base and foundation. Never is a cornerstone placed near the roof! This cornerstone provides structure, stability, and a declaration to all who enter the building. Our first building cornerstone is near the entrance and declares 1945, the date of construction. The church itself began forming in 1942 elsewhere, but the building's cornerstone is a concrete block, not the people. We, the people of this church, using this metaphor like bricks, build our faith one on top of the other for even more stability and strength. We become the living stones in that temple and like the priests, our relationship with God is paramount. Yes, we are already forgiven our sins, but our discipline and intimacy with God fortifies and must be a model for others.

How we live out our lives with Christ as our foundation are what makes us a holy priesthood. Peter states that Christ has made us his priests unto God, not like the priests of the Old Testament, however. Priests there performed two chief functions: offering sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem, and pronouncing the priestly blessing, but Christians do not perform the same sacrifices as Jewish priests did. We do not slaughter animals, but instead, we look to Jesus as our model and example through self-sacrifice for the benefit of others in need. I used a question mark about our holiness because we believers are never to feel holier than others, but we are set apart from general society because of our holy faith and role as believer priests. The sacrifices we make are not physical ones, but spiritual: time, vocation, money, effort, prayer. We

make them willingly of course. Privilege as a holy race implies responsibility and inclusivity; no longer is that holiness just for Israel or the priestly class of Jews. The holy priesthood I invite you to is a diverse, devout following of Jesus the Messiah. We once were sinners, perhaps even heathens, but through Christ, we are holy even if we feel unworthy. We cannot earn this holiness because Christ gives us this grace when we are born again in him. Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Dear Jesus, we love you so much. We thank you for your sacrifice and forgiveness. We thank you for this church and the opportunity to participate and lead in it; help us to accept the holiness and grace of your love. You are the cornerstone of our faith and this institution, the roots of our tree, so to speak. Strengthen our structure both physically and spiritually. Let others know we are a safe place to explore their faith journey and to branch out. Let us share Christ's salvation with others who need you. Please, Lord, bless our holy efforts and open these doors to the broken-hearted and the open-hearted so they can see you through us. We pray in your name, Amen.