

Sermon for May 3, 20206  
"A Blueprint for the Church"

1 Peter 2:2-10

I like blueprints. They're useful and handy. Blueprints are important. They are a plan for how something is supposed to fit together. They make it possible for more than one person to build on something and not have their work conflict. They allow one to plan ahead.

I'm no architect or engineer, but I do a little woodworking. Before I start cutting wood, I sit down and draw what I want to build. This helps me to anticipate problems ahead of time and to know what materials I will need. I have tried just jumping in sawing and hammering with disastrous results. Having a blueprint, a drawing, helps me to be able to build something that is both beautiful and useful.

Our lesson in 1 Peter is a blueprint for the church. Not of the church building of course. It is a blueprint for the spiritual structure of the church. It shows us how we are to be built into the Church and how the Church should operate. The problem is that too often we have our own ideas about the structure of the church, and how it should be built. The end result of using our own plans, or the world's plans, instead of God's blueprints is disastrous.

This is how the Methodist Church got started. The leaders of the Anglican Church in England in John and Charles Wesley's day were working with a worldly blueprint of the church. They thought that the church was structurally sound when actually it was in a spiritual shambles. The church of John Wesley's day thought the Gospel should stay in the church, but John took it into the fields, streets, factories, and schools saying, "The World is my Parish." Then he applied it to the social and economic injustices of his day. The early Methodist fought slavery and poverty, and they often found themselves working beside other Christians who were working from God's blueprint too.

The first thing we learn from God's blueprint in 1 Peter is that Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. He is a living stone that was rejected by people, but precious to God, and has been chosen as the cornerstone. In other words, Jesus is central to the church. The cornerstone in a building is laid first; it is primary to the rest of the structure, and so Jesus is primary to the church. All of the rest of the building, its walls and structures refer back to him for their placement.

You don't set a cornerstone and then start building walls without attaching them to the cornerstone. In the same way, the walls of the church, spiritually speaking, have to be connected to Christ. If you start laying bricks without reference to Christ, the walls will not meet up with him and the structure of the house will be unsound. In other words, we don't go about doing things in the church without looking to Christ as the source and purpose of those actions.

Too often, we try to be the church without reference to Christ. We listen to what the world has to say or what we think and get our bearings from that. I don't think we intend to exclude Christ from our considerations we simply lose sight of him. That is why we need to constantly re-fix our bearings on Christ. Make him the cornerstone of our lives as individuals and the cornerstone of all we do as a church. Jesus should be the reason for all that we do as Christians and as a congregation.

This is the opposite of what the world says. To them personal gain or fulfillment of desires should be the cornerstone of our lives. They argue that orienting our lives by some guy who lived in Galilee 2,000 years ago is ridiculous, but look at their lives. Often times they

are like fallen houses; lost in selfishness, greed and desire. Not that Christians don't fall off the wall from time to time, but at least we have a reference point to get back in place.

Therefore, if Jesus is the living cornerstone, then we are to be living stones in the building. The question is, "What kind of building?" Peter calls it a "spiritual house" or a "holy priesthood." The image is that of a temple or tabernacle. We are to be a spiritual structure dedicated to serving God. Peter also says that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen race. It is the purpose of our lives to serve God. Our lives and our life as a congregation should be a holy space for serving and praising God.

The problem is that too often we use the world's models to structure the church. Some people think of the church as being like a country club. A Country Club is a place for people to socialize. In that model of the church, the structures for outreach and worship get neglected. The church's life becomes one big fellowship hall. Worse yet, as with many country clubs, walls are built to keep people out. Not that fellowship is bad. It is important to the life of the church, but there is more to the church than just fellowship.

Some people think of the church as a school. There is a lot of merit to this model. We are commanded to teach people to be disciples for Christ, but there is the danger that people will think they can graduate or in other words arrive. They will grow to a certain point and then stop. Growing as a Christian is a lifelong endeavor, and should never stop. You can't graduate from church.

Some people think of the church as a social agency. There is a lot of merit here too. We are commanded to help those in need, but without a community of nurture and worship, we become spiritually bankrupt and what then do we have to offer a world hungry for the love of God?

Some think of the church as just a sanctuary. To them it is a place to escape the darkness of the world outside. Times of sanctuary are important, but that is not all the church is. The end result of this model is a church that just hides from the world's problems instead of trying to address them.

This is why the image of a holy nation is so important. In Christ, we are a community. At the same time, we are also a relief agency, a continuing education center, a sanctuary, etc. This plan of God for the church is a blueprint that is different from the world's blueprints. Because it's so different, it's difficult to explain. Maybe that is why Peter used so many images to describe it.

However, the emphasis of all of this talk of cornerstones and holy nations and royal priesthoods is this: We need to allow ourselves to be built into it. That is what that business of "spiritual milk" is all about? Just as milk feeds a baby and gives it what it needs, God's grace and the Holy Spirit give us what we need. We simply need to submit to God and allow him to help us grow into what God calls us to be. We must submit to the master builder and let him put us in place. We should stop trying to be the master builder and let God tell us where to put the next stone.

This is a personal as well as a congregational and denominational thing. Yes, we have to work at building the church. We need to lead people to Christ. We need to seek new ways to address the needs of people around us, but we have to first submit to God to let him build us into place. The board doesn't tell the carpenter where to cut it, and the brick doesn't tell the mason where to place the mortar, so we shouldn't try to supersede God's plans. God wrote the blueprint for the church. God should be the one to show us our place in it.