

May 18 2014

**Scripture Lessons** ~ *Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16*

*Acts 6:1-7*

*I Peter 2:2-10*

**Sermon**

*Set Apart by God*

I do not know if those in my congregation have noticed or not, I have a couple of little quirks. And one of the quirks that comes to the fore for me as I look at the passage from first Peter is the way I sometimes put things aside and don't use them for a little while. I sometimes do it with time and in the past I have sometimes hoarded weeks of vacation to save them, but I am not sure for what. I have a bike and George has been trying to get me to get it out of the garage and pump up the tires, so that I can go bike riding, and I love to go bike riding but it is more fun to just think of it in storage and all of the lovely beauty of the paint and the tires, and those types of things. You know I love books and I love to read, and I have dozens of books on all kinds of topics and I sometimes set them aside until that one wonderful day when I get to crack it open, maybe months down the line, when I get to read it. You know I do it with clothing, I like to get every last bit of wear out of each shirt or pants. Poor Maria gave me a new shirt about a year ago, and I finally cracked that one open and wore it. I do with film, I don't have a digital camera so I get the idiot cameras, and fill them up, and I have a full drawer of them that have never been processed, but I will get there. I think you get the idea. I have tried to physiologist myself on all these things, but I guess it is the memories of each of these items are somehow precious to me. I also just enjoy the potential of these things. Once something is used, the newness wears off, and the potential is gone and it is a whole other situation.

It occurs that the first part of this is true in our relationship with God. Because God takes from creation the things that are special and the things that are precious, the things that have great potential and God sets them aside, sets them aside not to just think about, not to just look at, but rather sets them aside to be used. And one of those things that God would like to use is each one of us. And I don't me to imply to use in an exploitive sense like use up or toss away or to take advantage of something, but use in the sense of bringing out the potential of us for service in the world. And how is it that God sets each one of us aside? Well first Peter 2 suggested 3 ways that God puts the potential we have to use in this world. First of all Peter implies that we are set aside as new born babies. It sounds kind of strange, but this is our original setting aside by God which often for many of us in church happens at our baptism but it definitely happens in the way that we as

adults those little children as babies in their faith. Here God chooses each one of us, we don't choose God. Now eventually as we get older, we cooperate in the process, but in the end we must still acknowledge that the Holy Spirit of God does the work we just provide the atmosphere in which the work takes place. And once this initial work is accomplished in our journey of faith, awareness has begun we are day by day sort of reborn as children in faith. We pick up new spiritual insights, and we are given second chance in life as we strive to accomplish new and better things with the gifts that God has given to each one of us.

But even if it is true that we can begin again when God sets us apart, the most important part of accepting the gift is to act as if the gift is true. It is so easy to go thru live without any sense of hope whatsoever but letting each day that we have a rough day to bring us down, down and down further and further. But if we are like Saint Peter said we are like newborn babies then we are called to act like newborn babies living out our Christian faith with a sense of energy and joy and enthusiasm and spark. And of course we want to leave out the throwing up and the temper tantrums, that part we don't want.

Now secondly the way in which God sets us apart from more common things as Saint Peter put it as a holy temple. If as the old testament prophesy stressed, Jesus as the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone of our faith and the foundation upon which we build to the living, then we are called to be in a sense 'temples' on that stone. Now temples are a holy place where God's spirit dwells. And the first image that this question begs is this; "How in the world does God's spirit live in us, in this temple which houses the person I am?" This concept of holiness implies what? It implies making room, making room for God which automatically means that our lives are going to be much different from others around us who don't see things in quite the same way as we see them. And it is difficult to live life being a different kind of person than those around you. We want to belong, we want to feel love, because we want to feel cared for. As a result we often speak and act in ways that are not in keeping with the sense of us being God's temple. We could start very basically with ways in ways that we care for our own body. What about the food that you put into your body? What about the drink that you put into your body? What about the exercise or lack thereof that you put into your body? And then we could move on to the ways we treat the bodies of other people. Do we help with their needs or do we build them up or tear them down? Do we treat them as people or do we treat them as objects just to be used on our way up the corporate ladder, or whatever ladder we happen to be climbing today? Whether we like it or not, God calls us to another way of living. God calls us to be different and believe me, getting used to this congregation some of you are more different than any others ever been with. Now this doesn't mean we have to be perfect, or mean we have to be goody two shoes, but it does mean

we have to acknowledge our humanity. It does mean that we will think twice before we misuse this temple that God has given to us, or misusing the temple of someone else who is in our lives.

Finally Peter says we are set aside by God as a Holy Priesthood. And as such our lives become a kind of sacrifice to God, what does that mean? It sounds kind of Catholic doesn't it? Well once we begin to acknowledge the positive influence in our lives it sort of naturally follows that we want to return something of ourselves to God and to God's service out of appreciation, out of gratitude for what God has done for each one of us. But of course I think of the traditional things like time and personal gifts, and material possessions, but unfortunately our world can be a very, very selfish place. And while it is good for us to take really good care of ourselves, and take good care of our family and our friends, some of us do so at the expense of God and at the expense of others around us. Some of us, myself included receive a tax break for our gifts to charity. But do we have to get a tax break for what is due to God? Who has our spiritual needs met every single week in church, so must they be met every single week before I can praise God for all that God has done for me? As Christians then we are called to be pretty different as priests of God our whole life not just the good times, is a reflection of God's love, and God's mercy in our lives and in the lives of other people. So I encourage you today as you look at this passage from First Peter and you reflect on what God is saying here this morning I hope that you will examine your own life, look inside and see how God has so lovingly set you apart, first look at yourself as a child, look for that freshness, look for that zest in your life of faith. Secondly see how Jesus has filled you with his love, and how it has and can still change your life and change the life of those around you. And finally seek and find that exciting place that God has for you, in the church, in the larger world around you, and use the gifts of your time and talent and treasure for God's purpose, because as Peter reminds us You are a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, you are God's people and this is your purpose, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of the one who called you out of darkness and into a marvelous light. Once upon a time you were no people, but now you are God's people. Once upon a time you had not received mercy, but now you have received God's mercy. And together we say Amen.