

Dear Church of God at Abiding Grace,

We are building our church. You're aware of that, right? I don't think that is a surprise to anyone. The walls are up, the trusses are up, the utilities are going in. We're building our church. After all this time preparing, planning and permitting, praying and paying, we are building our church, finally! Are you excited? You know, when we got together to talk about building our building, we said we wanted something that "looks like a church," right? ...Something that people wouldn't get confused with an office building or someone's house. It was supposed to "look like a church." Have you seen it? Do you think it does?

Well, I hate to break this to you, but that building going up on Hwy 212, even once the stained glass gets in, will look nothing like what anything those first Easter Christians would have thought of when they heard that word. In fact, when the Bible uses the word "church," it talks about people. Our text today is the closest the New Testament ever comes to describing a building, and even this is very clear that it is a spiritual building we're talking about. The physical buildings we build are just designed to represent what Scripture says about this collection of people it describes as "Church" – something set apart, holy, beautiful, precious. And personally, I think what we're building does that pretty well, but let's never forget what "Church" is far more important.

So today, let's study this Scripture from 1 Peter 2 that teaches us so much about what the Church is. And really, the lesson Peter is driving into our Easter heads and hearts is this: **You have been Churched.**

You have been churched. Let's read the text. Right after Peter had talked about how powerful the Word of God was and is in their lives to bring them to and keep them in Jesus, he writes this:

1 Peter 2:4-10 ⁴As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," ⁸and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for. ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is God's Word. You have been churched. Now, it's pretty clear what Peter is talking about here, isn't it? He's not talking about the fact that you've got your membership letter at one particular organization or another, or that you support the work of Abiding Grace with your time, talents, and treasures according to your promises. The Greek word that we translate as church really is a two-part word – *ek klyhsia* – that's the preposition *ek*, or "out of" and the noun that means "calling". In our text, we see it in its verb form, when Peter tells you that you have been called out. You've been *ekklesia'd*, churched. And my friends, that means so much more than having your names written on some membership roll or giving offerings to some organization.

Peter tells us that **you have been Churched to see the light of what he calls the Living Stone. And you have been Churched to shine that light as living stones.** You've been churched, you've been "called out" of darkness into His wonderful light.

Even though that phrase shows up at the end of the text, it is what comes first. It is what Peter had been talking about in the first part of this letter, that they were different now because of what the "**living and enduring Word of God**" had done for them. It had taken them out of darkness – with its imagery of ...really, a lack of imagery, where you can't see, where you don't know what is going on, where you have no idea where you're going and where fear and suspicion and worry live.

That's where Peter says we were. And you know he's right, don't you? The women on the way to the tomb sulking instead of celebrating; the disciples in the upper room afraid instead of astounded; you – worried instead of wowed. Without those angels telling the women what happened on Easter, without Jesus appearing in that upper room, without God's Word reinforcing his promises on your hearts – darkness is an accurate picture for us.

But we've been "churched" from that. We've been called out of darkness into His wonderful light. That's what Easter does. Really, that's what God's Word does as it tells us about Easter. Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! See, you've been churched.

You see the light. You see what Peter is talking about when he describes our risen Savior with such picturesque language.

You see that he is the "**Living Stone**" verse 4 talks about, not some old, antiquated dead stone. He is vital and absolutely necessary for a building, and Peter uses some pictures the Old Testament prophets had used to describe Christ to show just how vital: Look at verse 6. He's the cornerstone of the building. He's saying that this living and enduring stone is

the most important part of the structure. He's the stone that the rest of the building takes its shape from, the stone that gives the lines and angles and foundational support for the whole thing. And then in verse 7, he shifts the picture saying that this living stone is the capstone, that top stone in an arch that supports all the weight of that arch, without which the structure falls.

You get that, right? Without Jesus, all of this church stuff falls apart. Without Jesus, Abiding Grace becomes just some social club, where we get together because we like hanging out with one another, but as soon as someone ticks me off, I'm gone, or if people aren't enough like me, I'm outta here. Without Jesus, church becomes a business venture, and decisions are made based on dollars and cents and people are guilted into acting and they talk to each other like only what I want is important and who cares how you feel about it. Without Jesus we'd get upset at each other and assume the worst of each other because you're not doing things my way. Without Jesus, Abiding Grace looks just like the cut-throat, selfish, me-first world we live in. Without Jesus, Abiding Grace is just another tool Satan could use to carry people to hell.

But you've been called out of that. Abiding Grace has been called out of that. Through Jesus, through the miracle of the power of the Gospel – we have been called out of that darkness to see the wonderful light of the living Stone, making us living stones, living like a Church – like those called out of all that junk and called to the one, as Peter describes this way: **“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.”**

The builders, the leaders of the physical church of Jesus' day had rejected that light. They had rejected Jesus and wanted to build their church on the way of the world – the darkness. It didn't work. They tossed out the cornerstone. They killed the light. And in so doing, Jesus was taking on their sin and mine. He was paying for all the times we treat church like anything but a gathering of those “Called Out”. He died in darkness on that cross so that we can live in the light.

And you know that. In fact, you know that he won, that he defeated our sin. You know that “Christ is Risen”. He is risen indeed. You have been church-ed. Now look at what that means for you. You've been church-ed not just to see the light of the Living Stone – but to shine the light as living stones.

Peter wrote: **“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** Peter wrote, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”**

Wow! Can you even imagine that?! He took us, who so naturally fight, quarrel, gossip, slander, and all that other stuff that looks nothing like Jesus, the living stone – and he makes us what he just listed: reflections of that living Stone – the stones built on Him. He makes us a holy priesthood. Those priests were set apart. They wore better clothes, they said better things. They worked in a better place. They represented God to the people. And now Peter says that that is us?! And the sacrifices we offer are well pleasing to God!

Go right through that list. You are a chosen people. Earlier he used that same word “chosen” to describe Jesus. He was God's one and only, precious, the one chosen to complete His plan. And now God uses that Word to describe you and me. We are chosen. We're here for a reason ...special ...precious to God. We're not gathered together by chance. God chose us!

And you are a royal priesthood. That's fascinating. The kings from the line of David were very special, given power by God. The priests from the line of Aaron were very special, given privilege and responsibility by God for the spiritual well being of his people. But never after God instituted that Davidic kingship and that Aaronic priesthood, never until Jesus did one person fit both of those descriptions. Now as believers, as living stones built on this Living Stone, you have all those rights and privileges. You are royalty that will sit on thrones in heaven over all. You are priests that have direct access to God and who so powerfully represent him here on earth – You've been church-ed to be a royal priesthood.

And he goes on: You are a holy nation. I know, we don't look like it. We had to admit that in our confession this morning. But that's the darkness talking. Look in the light of God's Word – you are forgiven...you are holy. Through the blood of Jesus Christ poured out on you for the forgiveness of all your sins, through the water of Baptism filling you with the Holy Spirit, through the living and enduring Word of God building you up – you are holy.

And you, Peter says, are a people belonging to God. You are His own... and for a reason, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. And you do that by being what God has made you, living the love Jesus commanded in the Gospel lesson that shows all people that you are God's, by speaking the Word Paul and Barnabas considered their duty to speak. You declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light by being called out, by being the Church.

May God bless this Church. In Christ, Amen.