

Fifth Sunday of Easter • May 10, 2020ⁱ

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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1 Peter 2:2-10

“House and Home”

So we've started to get ready for our move to Illinois. If you've ever moved before, you've probably had a checklist for everything that needs to happen before you actually move out. Apparently, one of the biggest items on the checklist as you're getting ready to move is finding a place to live. It's true!

Finding the right place to call home can be a challenge. And with everything going on in the world right now, it's probably even tougher. There are houses out there. But in our case, most of those haven't seemed quite right for us. We're looking for a house that fits our family while also being a part of the community we're going to serve. Finding the right place to call home is about finding a house that can be a **home base** for the next chapter of life.

Are you getting tired of your own house these days? The same walls. The same people. Is it starting to feel a bit old? I suspect that even the nicest of our houses can start to feel like prisons if you can't really get out an about. I've seen vacation housing websites featuring “virtual vacation” properties during these stay-at-home times. You can “go” and visit fantastic homes in beautiful locations at the beach or in the mountains, browsing through images of places you might live, if only for a little while. Wouldn't it be great to have a home that didn't confine you, but freed you? A house that didn't shut you in but connected you to the world around you? Peter's got some good news for you today!

Our epistle reading comes from Peter's first letter to Christians who lived in other parts of the ancient Roman world. It's a message of encouragement, especially since many of those early disciples were experiencing persecution because of their faith. Many of those Jesus-followers were Gentiles, coming from homes where their families had not known of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Peter had come to understand that these people were recipients of God's grace just as much as he was, so he's writing to build them up in the new life they now share. Going back to see the verses right before today's reading, we find that Peter shows Christians – them then and us now – are called to put away bad the bad and bring in the good. It's sort of like when you move to a new house, you chuck out all the stuff that you don't need or want to take with you. There's no point in bringing along junk when your new home comes fully furnished with superior goods, right?

As Peter lays it out, the new home for all God's people is anchored on Christ Jesus. In this season of Easter, we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the Rock of our salvation, on which our hope is built. Through the risen Lord, you and I may have the sure hope that death cannot destroy us, even though the rest of the world be shaken. He is the cornerstone, the perfect measure by which the rest of the building lines up. He is the foundation for the new life which comes as you are connected into him. If you've ever seen how some manufacturers – Apple, for instance – use magnets to perfectly align components so that they snap right together and hold strong, our life in Christ is kind of like that. The Holy Spirit brings you close to Jesus and connects you to him, realigning you so that you can be where you're meant to be. He brings us together.

We're born disconnected, apart. Nobody starts “in neutral;” each of us human beings began our journey through life as a runaway. We've actively headed away from God. And some people will continue to do so. Peter doesn't mince words here. They won't believe that Jesus is the one who came to rescue them from sin and death, or that they even need a Rescuer. They will stumble over this Rock. Even so, Jesus continues to call all people to know the life he has won for them. He has called you. He has called you home.

You don't have to wait for heaven to be “home with Christ.” God's Word shows that you have a home with him, now and forever. As Jesus himself tells his disciples in John 14(:2-3), “*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” The Holy Spirit connects us into Christ's body as the Church, the spiritual house of living stones, stones who are living precisely because we are connected to our risen Lord Jesus. No matter what distance might separate us, you and I are still together in the spiritual house of Christ's Church. And this home isn't merely for us. There's room enough for all people Jesus calls to himself. Again, it's sort of like magnets: a powerful electromagnetic field can course through a line of individual objects, connecting them all together. As the Spirit builds us together as this

spiritual house, we are ever expanding, connecting with the people around us and connecting them with Christ.

Jesus has taken you to himself. You have a place in his Father's house. **So how does that shape your earthly home?**

Because you are a member of the body of Christ as people of the resurrection, the shape of your heavenly home guides and directs your present life. The present pandemic is shaking the world, even the lives of people near and dear to us. Your life has a deeper foundation, though, in the risen Lord. How might you show him and his love to those around you each day – especially when you have no choice but to see them day after day? Peter has an answer: offer the spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Pray.** Pray for and with the people around you. **Praise.** Praise the One who gives you life each new day and, along with it, opportunities for growing in faith and joy. **Give thanks.** Thank the Lord for the innumerable blessings He gives to you and to all people, remembering above all that He has welcomed you into His house and given you a home.

As our nation celebrates Mother's Day, I encourage you to pray, praise, and give thanks for your mother. God gave you the gift of life through her. If your relationship with your mother has suffered under the brokenness of our world, I pray that our risen Lord would bring whatever healing is needed. Also remember those who have served a mothering role in your life, especially those who have pointed you towards Jesus and connected you into this house of faith we share.

No matter where you might be, you have a place to live in Christ. He has called you to be his own. You are a living stone that is connected into the limitless, wonderful, spiritual house that is his Church. Through our risen Lord, you have a home with your heavenly Father. A heavenly home base, if you will, one that will shape the world around you. Welcome home!

Amen.

ⁱ Passage for memory:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – 1 Peter 2:9