



St Anne's, Steveston: 125th Anniversary, October 23, 2016

1 Peter 2: 1-9

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

From a CTV news story:

"When Jennifer Storrar, 24, kayaked across a lake this June with her boyfriend, Troy Reddington, 25, to find a time capsule they had buried five years ago, she had no idea that the past she was digging up would actually reveal her future. The time capsule was supposed to be filled with the couple's favourite songs, old cellphones and (descriptions of) their dream jobs. Instead, Jennifer found a cleaned-out jar of peanut butter with a note wrapped in a ribbon inside which read "Will you marry me?"

In May, Troy had snuck out in the middle of the night to the island campsite on Eagle Lake in South River, Ontario, to replace the contents of the old jar with a new one containing the proposal letter. He had come up with the idea three years after they had buried the capsule while they were sitting around a campfire and talking about it.

‘It kind of struck me that this would really work,’ Troy said. ‘I’m not ready to get engaged yet but when I am, this is what I want to do.’

Troy waited another two years before sneaking back out the island at 3 a.m. to set up the elaborate proposal before heading to his job and then meeting up with Jennifer to make the trek back to their island campsite to open the capsule.

Troy said that Jennifer was initially angry when she saw the new jar in the capsule thinking that someone had replaced the original contents without her knowledge. He said her reaction immediately changed once she read his letter.

‘I’ve never seen her so happy in my life,’ Troy said. ‘She was crying and she almost made me cry...which never happens.’”

The story of someone expecting to look into the past and instead receiving a brand new vision of who she would be and what she would do in the future.

This, I believe, and nothing less, is what our story should be today, on St. Anne’s 125th anniversary. We should expect not only to celebrate the past but with a little help from the Spirit, receive some hints of a brand new vision of ourselves for the future.

And we should not have to wait until the end of the liturgy when we bring out the time capsule to do this. No, within this very liturgy we have already opened a kind of time capsule filled with Holy Scripture: stories, a poem and a letter from long our collective past as Christian people. If you and I look at these with the eyes of faith and hope, it may be that we will catch a vision for our future in them.

And so what is in our Scriptural time capsule for this morning? First, we have the story from the 1st Book of Kings in which King Solomon prays his dedicatory prayer for the magnificent temple he has built for the Jewish people. Secondly, we have Psalm 84 which expresses the thoughts and feelings of a pilgrim as she makes her way to the great temple in Jerusalem. Third, we have a story from the Gospel of John, in which Jesus is walking in the magnificent temple in Jerusalem and is asked if he is the Messiah, to which he makes an impertinent response. And finally, we have a nugget from the First Epistle of Peter in which we hear words of encouragement addressed to a small, struggling Christian communities out in Asian Minor.

Today it’s this last piece of Scripture, the passage from the First Epistle of Peter, that I’d like to take out of our time capsule, hold up in front of us and see if it might be making some sort of proposal to us about who and what we might be in the future. I choose this passage and not one of the other three because this passage and this passage alone is not about the temple, that magnificent center of the religious and cultural life of the Jewish people. Instead the focus in our passage from the Epistle of Peter is on the people, on the community of faith that is the Church within the context of a challenging cultural environment. And, of course, like my story of Jennifer and Troy, it is a letter.

This letter, not actually thought to be written by Peter, was, scholars believe written perhaps to a number of church communities mentioned earlier in the letter who found themselves “in exile,” that is, in challenging and inhospitable settings in which they would either be greeted with suspicion or harassment. Within this context and to these peoples the letter’s words are addressed, words that are meant both to encourage and sustain them through reminding them about who they were as Christians and who they would need to be to thrive in the future.

And here is what the author of the letter says:

“Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: “See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” and “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

In other words:

- Stay in touch with your hunger for God, putting aside anything that would get in the way of it.
- Work together like living stones as you build up the community that is the church, always resting on the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ.
- Know that you are chosen by God, made holy by God, made royal by God. God has called you out of darkness into the light. Wherever you are, you are to witness to the God who has called you out of darkness into the light.

And, so, people of St. Anne’s, imagine that this letter from this morning’s Scriptural time capsule does hold a vision for your future as people and as a parish:

- Where is your hunger for God being expressed? What might you need to put aside in order to make a path for this hunger?
- Where does this parish of living stones need strengthening? In what way might this parish cleave even more fully to the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ?
- And, finally, where might your being chosen by God, your being made holy by God, your being made royal by God, your being led by God from darkness into light, where might these things be expressed both within your lives and within the way St. Anne’s interacts with others?

Today is a wonderful day—125 years of life to look back on, to celebrate and to be thankful for. But this wonderful day would not be right, would not be all that it could be, if we did not catch a glimpse of where God is calling us forward into God's future, a call either hidden among the tokens of the past or mysteriously added there by the hand of the One who loves us.

Happy Anniversary, St. Anne's. Thanks be to God who is our end and our beginning; who carries us and goes before us, who is our journey and our journey's end.