

Respecting The Pagans

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] in this church. There are seven of them, and the seventh is the Reverend Dr. Harry Robinson, and the date is 1992. It's a little ominous that there's only one box left, I've got to tell you.

There are lots of, I know, there are lots of spaces on this wall too. It's a great delight for me tonight to welcome Harry Robinson, who's going to come to us in a minute and bring God's word to us. You know, Harry retired from being the rector of this parish last September, and he has kindly agreed to come and speak to us. And I've thought a lot about how to introduce Harry. I could introduce him as the man who organized Steve James to come to this parish.

I could introduce him to you as a man who has unique preaching gift. I could introduce him as a man who's been used by God powerfully in the lives of people here in St. John's and right across Canada, or as a man who is a friend and a mentor. But I think the way Harry would probably want to be introduced is as a sinner saved by grace. Welcome. And now before Harry speaks to us, we're going to stand and declare our own faith together. If you take the green book and turn back back to page 234. Let's stand.

Together. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and Son, who will follow the Son together, through the Lord, and be saved by the cross.

[3 : 04] I believe in one of the Holy Catholic and the Catholic Church, I acknowledge the one that has been with the Christ, I believe in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Let's bow our heads for prayer, shall we? Our Father, we thank you that you speak to us through your servants. We pray now, as Harry directs our minds and hearts to your word, that we may know you and know ourselves. Bless him, we pray, and enable us to hear your voice, and so to be your people. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. So we're looking at 1 Peter chapter 2, which you'll find somewhere in the back of your Bible. I know it comes before 221, but I'm not sure exactly what page it is. Maybe someone does. 217. There it is.

The thing that I'm somewhat overwhelmed with, and in order to make this evening less frustrating for you and somewhat less frustrating for me, I want to tell you about it, and that is that you receive a tremendous amount of information in the course of a week. And that information, you know, if you were to keep it all, you would blow up into a balloon and float to the ceiling. So one of the basic skills of survival in this society is to forget almost as much as you hear. And some people are very good at that.

Oh, yeah. And so I want to play a little game with you to start with, and I'll show you what it is. And it's, this is the thing. Well, I'll tell you why I'm doing it afterwards.

[5 : 44] Yes, please. The second chapter of 1 Peter is primarily about the rock or the stone. Now, could someone just hold this for me?

Yes, please. Yes, please. Yes, please. Yes, please. Now, thank you very much for volunteering to do that.

Now, the name of the game is that you can't put it down. You either have to hold onto it personally or pass it to somebody else, but don't put it down.

Now, got that? You can go now. Now. It will break your foot, maybe your leg, so do be careful of it. Now, while that is happening, just look at verse 6 of chapter 2.

[7 : 17] Scripture says, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone. See that? Before that, it says in verse 4, you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.

Ah, and you, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. Then it goes on in verse 8 and says, a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

Now, the reason we're playing this silly game is that by Wednesday of this week, you will have forgotten all about the sermon, but you'll remember the silly stone that's being passed around.

And that will be the kind of trigger mechanism by which I hope you will be able to recall to your mind the second chapter of 1 Peter.

So keep the stone going so that it makes a deep impression on everybody here tonight before we're done. Now I want just to prepare you for a moment to look at this chapter.

[8 : 37] I was led by a friend of a Sunday evening when I was 18 years old and in high school to put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

I'd be along to a church all my life. I'd been involved in it. But on this particular night, I came to put, I was invited to, and I felt, I heard what it was that the gospel was all about.

And I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Ten years later, I was ordained to the Anglican ministry and put in charge of a parish.

The difficulty in those days, which I think makes it different from these days, is that when you confronted somebody to tell them the good news of Jesus Christ, and you told them you are not a Christian and you should become a Christian, they were deeply offended at being told they weren't Christians.

Because in those days, what you meant in saying it was that they had no personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

[10 : 05] But in those days, a Christian was a person who was defined by being morally superior, intellectually conservative, politically skeptical, and socially acceptable.

Do you get that? Morally superior, intellectually conservative, politically skeptical, and socially acceptable.

So, that was the kind of picture of a person, and anybody who fell within those categories would tend to say that's what it means to be a Christian. Now, the situation that we're in at the moment is very different from that.

The reason it's different is that nowadays, to profess that you are a Christian means that you are intellectually naive, politically insignificant, morally unacceptable, and socially a disaster.

And so that it's not popular in the same way. It's politically, sorry, just to work through those things, it is intellectually naive because of a commitment to the Bible that was felt to be compromised by the world, by the modern world, and rejected by the postmodern world.

[11 : 48] The Bible is the center of your relationship to God in Christ, and that has been rejected by the world in which we live. So, intellectually, it's naive to hold to that.

It is politically insignificant. That means powerless because we are committed to a universe and live in what politically is defined as a multiverse.

That is, it's made up of many things. There is nothing unified about it, particularly the character of God, so that politically we're out of step. It is morally insignificant, being a Christian, for two reasons.

First, the public failure of prominent Christian leaders in matters of sexual behavior and the biblical commitment to heterosexual monogamy, which cripples the full expression of our human sexuality in the world in which we live, or that's how they understand it.

And socially, it's a disaster because Christians bring to almost every situation in which they find themselves a sense that they don't belong. And the more you try to belong, the more disastrous the situation becomes.

[13:20] Socially, a Christian is like a person that wears pants in a nudist colony and then walks naked down Main Street.

That's, and there's an example of that in the Bible, if you want me to tell you where it is. I, but it's just totally out of phase with everything and everybody.

And nobody likes to be in that position. But I tell you that because it may help you to realize that the situation into which the epistle that we're looking at was written was written to a tiny minority of people who were themselves being forged into a community, a community which has the mandate to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole unbelieving community in which they live.

Now, you may get the wrong impression by being here at St. John's on Sunday night. You may think the whole world is here. It ain't.

And by noon tomorrow, though you may be in a vast majority of professing Christians here tonight, you will be in an almost negligible minority of Christians wherever you are at noon tomorrow.

[14:50] And so what you need to do in reading 1 Peter 2 is not learn how to survive Sunday nights, but how to survive Monday noon, how to live in our world as a Christian.

And that's, I think, one of the things that's probably important for you to try and understand. So look at that and realize that what Peter is writing in this letter is to people in that position.

And he says this is how you are to survive as an insignificant minority in a community that is not altogether like 1 Peter because 1 Peter was written to Christians in a vast pagan society.

We are living as Christians in a society that has abandoned Christianity, abandoned the Christian church, abandoned the scriptures as the basis of moral, ethical, social, political, and intellectual life. And so in some ways it's more excruciatingly difficult. But what Peter says is nevertheless very specifically applicable to the circumstance in which you live.

[16:26] Now look at the text for a moment, and I'll try and share with you what I think is there for us. I'm just saying this to you because I like that rock.

I don't want you to put this down. I want you either to hold on to it yourself or to pass it on to somebody else because of the importance of what is said here.

It begins, therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Now what that basically means is do your housekeeping.

You will find that the house you live in is littered with those things.

Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. If you could get rid of those things, which in a sense are the fuel by which you live your life in our world, it's the thing that keeps our world going around, is this process of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

[17:43] If you could take those things and take them out of your life, do you know what would happen? You'd have time to pray. Probably hours of it.

You'd have time to read your Bible. You'd have time to build some kind of relationship with people. Not on the basis of malice, envy, deceit, slander.

Not on that basis, which is how we normally relate to people. I mean, if you don't believe me, think of driving your car down the road. When somebody blows their horn, what they're saying to you is, malice.

I hope you roll into the curb. It's the kind of thing that happens when you, deceit is deliberately deceiving somebody.

Hypocrisy is, well, you could do this in a little drama with each other, you know. If you want to be a hypocrite, the thing for you to do now is to get down on your knees, close your ears, look up into heaven, and hold your hands together like this for the rest of the service.

[19:00] And everybody would know what a hypocrite was at the end of the service. You know, we can dramatize it in that way. Envy, of course, you understand.

And slander is, is the way we talk about other people. For the most part, I mean, it's the, it's the way we always do. Somebody slanders somebody, and then you can do a little bit better.

You, and that's how conversation goes. They, there's a minor slander, and then there's a major slander, and then there's a catastrophic slander, and then there's capital slander. On it goes, and we add to one another.

So, if you were to remove that all from your life, there would be a lot of room in your life for some really quite good things. And, I think good things could start happening.

What are the kind of things that could happen? Well, if you look in verse three, you will see, or verse two, like newborn babes, crave spiritual milk, so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation. [20 : 06] That is, that is a direct appeal to make room for. These other things are not growing. They're cancerous. They're sort of mental and emotional cancer.

Malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. There's no growth in them for you. The growth comes from having tasted that the Lord is good.

And having tasted it, you develop, you deliberately develop an addiction for it. You look for it wherever you can.

You take it whenever you get the possibility. And there's a peculiar word there, which I can't explain, but I can perhaps excite your interest in it by saying, when it says pure spiritual milk, some people have translated it logical milk.

It's milk that builds your mind and your spirit and gives you growth. Positive growth. And you are to have a longing for that.

[21 : 15] And you have tasted it in having heard and received the gospel. Then you see, you move all this junk out of your life and you devote yourself to that central addiction to the pure spiritual milk that you may grow up into the salvation or the wholeness which God intends for you.

That you will grow up spiritually. That your mind and spirit will be informed and edified and built up. That's what's going to happen to you.

Then he goes on to tell you how that's going to work. And the way it works is in verse 4 in the first few words of it.

As you come to him the living stone. This is where we get into the stone, you see. You see who it is that's writing that?

This is Peter of whom Jesus said, Thou art the rock and on this rock I will build my church. Now Peter is saying, Thou art the rock, the living stone.

[22 : 31] He's pointing to Jesus Christ. So the rock points to the rock and says, You are also living stones. So you see how the whole thing is built together in quite a remarkable way.

that he wants to build you into a spiritual house. Now the important thing about this and probably very important for you people is that desiring the pure spiritual milk that you might grow up into salvation means that you will not just grow up as an individual of peculiarly perfect sanctity and holiness so different from all the people around you.

But that in fact you will grow in your relationship to all the people around you as you come to the living stone and they come to the living stone and he accomplishes in you that which is pleasing in his sight.

That he will build you into relationship to other people. Other people who normally and formerly you would relate to only by means of malice slander envy deceit hypocrisy that would be the pattern of your relationship but now you come as a living stone and you are built into relationship with other people.

Now most people I mean I think we have a terrible arrogance tendency to try and become isolated and cut off from one another to be superior to one another to do the very things which Paul says put him out of the way to treat others.

[24 : 28] I mean in some senses religious I mean it the religious community has refined to a very sharp edge malice deceit hypocrisy envy and slander we do it so beautifully that nobody knows that they've been cut in two and so that that's totally contrary to what the one you come to wants to do with you as a living stone you are built into a spiritual household and that's to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ so that what what this this this living spiritual household he suddenly changes the picture and says this is a this is a priesthood and that is in

Jesus Christ we help pagan people to relate to the living God that's the function you have in society that's the that's what Jesus wants to do with you to build you into a community that will be the means of a pagan world coming to know a living and risen savior and that's when he says that you're to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and he goes and talks some more about the stone by quoting Isaiah I lay a stone in Zion a chosen and precious stone very important statement because you see most of I mean so often what we do the mistake we make about our lives I make about mine you make about yours is to think what a wonderful person I am so devout so sincere so straightforward and such a really nice person and

God must be very proud to have me on his side and we think of that and I'll tell you that you didn't come to the service tonight to be reminded of that you came to the service tonight and will in the course of preparing to take part in the Holy Communion you will be reminded that that is not who you are that it's something entirely different from that and so what what has to happen is that you come to a chosen and precious cornerstone in all the revelation of scripture in all the searching and hungering of the human heart in all the history of humankind there is a pearl of great price there is a stone of great great worth the reason we come to him is because he is that stone he is the one and in coming to him that's where the value of our faith lies it doesn't lie in us and our sincerity and our piety and our prayerfulness and our discipline it is in the one to whom we come and we come to him because he is precious and he is chosen and he is the

God appointed cornerstone look at verse 7 you who believe this stone is precious and you've seen and acknowledged that infinite worth and others have seen and have not acknowledged it they have rejected it and they have rejected Jesus Christ now it's not your business to pour judgment upon those people their judgment comes because at the very point at which life comes together and finds its meaning in Jesus Christ they have stubbornly refused to believe to believe what is obviously of great worth and value and they have rejected it and having rejected it instead of it being the foundation of their lives it becomes the stone on which they stumble and fall and trip and it destroys everything they try to do with their lives because they have left that out which is precious and chosen they have left him out of their lives they have said

I don't need him in my life I don't need that which is precious I don't need that which is God appointed I don't need that which is God selected I don't need that which is of ultimate worth I don't need that I have it in myself and so that becomes to them a stone of stumbling and a rock that makes them fall and look at the end of verse 8 they stumble because they disobey the message which is also what they were destined for you see they've rejected the message and they and God has to I mean God the gospel is preached in two ways it's preached in one way where people hear it and receive it and believe it it's preached in another way where people hear it and reject it and discard it but both of them are dealing with God when they do that and the purpose that God has in that is that all might come to know that they are dealing with God some by rejecting him and some by receiving him and it gets more complicated because you begin to find the people who've rejected him suddenly realize that they want to receive him and the people who've received him suddenly find themselves so filled with pride and self-importance that they're rejecting him

[31 : 35] I'm going to quit but I'm coming back next week so but I want to tell you what I want you to do with this I mean you've got one Peter too and you can work on it and if you want to start by firing questions next week you can but what I want to do with it is this you see what what is happening tonight in you being invited to partake of the Holy Communion is that living stone that precious selected stone in a sense is being set before you in the person of Jesus Christ it's put before you and you are to come to him and you may stumble and fall because you want to reject him or you may believe on him and submit to him and submit is what it means in this in addition this chapter deals a lot with submission but you see the picture is this that God has made this known to us he's put this in the midst of us he's put it in the place where we can't overlook it we can't neglect it and in it he has expressed his total commitment of love to us in and through the person of the living stone

Jesus Christ who in demonstration of man's rejection because man crucified him and God's acceptance and vindication because God raised him from the dead he demonstrates that to us so that we might know his unconditional commitment to us the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus says to us come to me I want you to eat this bread and drink this wine so that you will know that God's commitment to you is unconditioning and so you will find it for yourself perhaps for the first time but probably mostly a renewal of your commitment to him that as you acknowledge God's commitment to you so you receiving the gifts of bread and wine are claiming afresh God's grace and God's mercy and God's love you're claiming that afresh and renewing your relationship to him because your relationship to him as mine as constantly wanders and constantly veers off and constantly gets lost and constantly gets preoccupied in all sorts of things with other issues we renew our relationship to him who has totally committed himself in relationship to us through Jesus Christ so you see there's something for you to do and it's not very complicated and it's not very difficult but it's very profoundly important that you come to him to the living stone rejected by the world in which you live largely but chosen and precious and you in receiving his

mercy are renewing your commitment to the God who has committed himself to you in Jesus Christ that's what you're doing and that's what the rest of this service is about and I hope that you'll pray that you may be given a great vision of God's unconditional commitment to you you'll be made aware of his grace and mercy in allowing you to renew your relationship to him in the midst of the circumstances of your life in the midst of the tendency to malice and envy and hypocrisy slander which is so much a part of our lives from out of this we say we want something different and God offers us that in Jesus Christ and we renew ourselves in our relationship to him as we take part in the service

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen