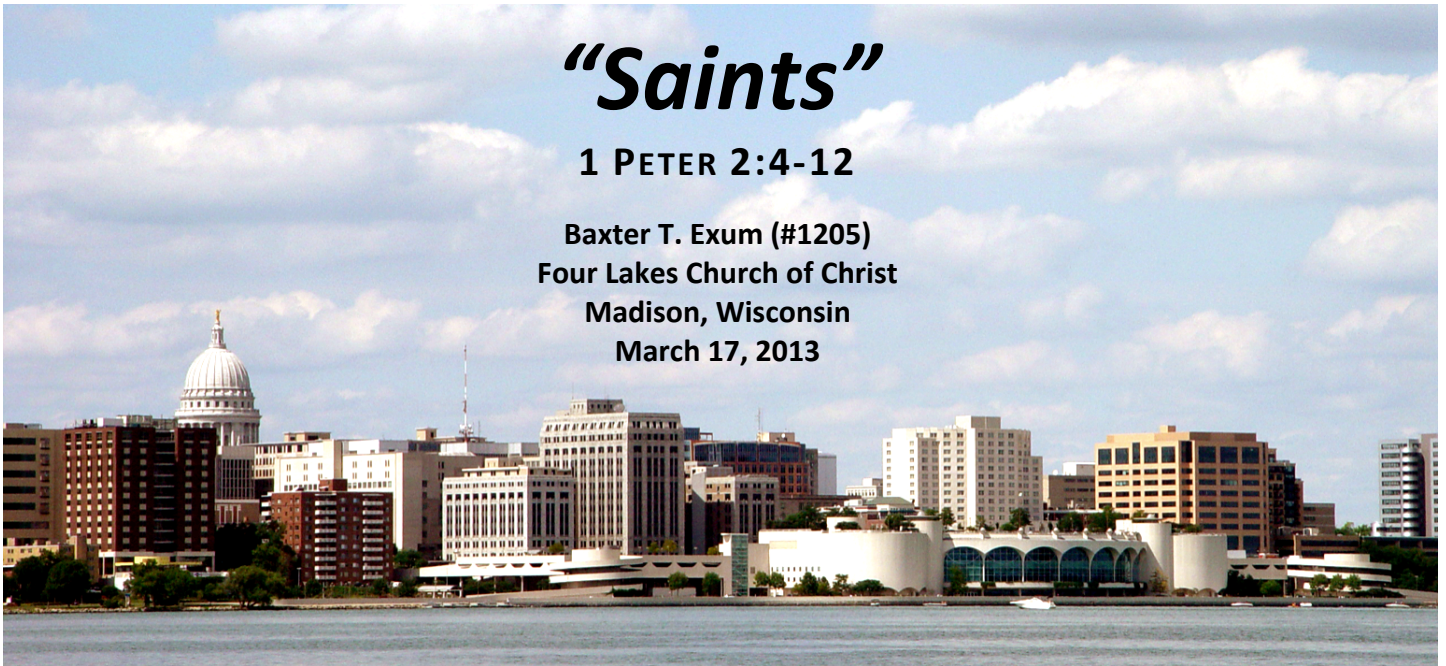


“Saints”

1 PETER 2:4-12

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Madison, Wisconsin
March 17, 2013**



This past Tuesday, one of the members of this congregation emailed a sermon request that changed the course of my week. This is certainly not what I had planned on preaching this morning, but the request was actually from a child who had been asking about SAINTS. We understand that the Catholic Church has been in the news quite a bit over the past month or so, so we understand why our children might be asking about such a relevant subject. The parent, then, was asking for a lesson on saints, so that we can learn the truth based on what the Word tells us. After I got that email, I looked at the calendar and realized that today is “Saint Patrick’s Day,” so with that combined with all that has been in the news this week concerning the pope, I thought that this is obviously something that we need to cover sooner rather than later.

By now, most of you have the handout for this morning’s lesson, and on the first page I have copied a section from the Catholic Encyclopedia from the article on Beatification and Canonization concerning the process that is necessary (in their particular religious tradition). I can tell you: I learned a lot this week! I learned that Beatification is the step before sainthood. I hope I do not over simplify this, but basically (as I understand it), becoming a saint is a two-step process, 1.) Beatification, and then 2.) Canonization – that is the point at which someone is called a “saint.” I will let you explore all of the details on your own, but as I understand it, in order to be a saint (according to the Catholic Church, at least), 1.) You need to be dead, and then 2.) You need to have at least two verified miracles performed in your name after your death. And once you are proclaimed a saint, people still on the earth can then pray to God through you. As a saint, you are then kind of a go-between between God and those who are still living on earth.

And as you can see, there is a huge process in all of this. You can be fast-tracked into sainthood if you die for the faith, if you are a martyr – basically, if you are preaching and you are killed in the line of duty – that is the six-step process on the back. But if you are not a martyr, you need to go through the 20 steps on the front. All of this is for Beatification. The second big step is for actual sainthood, the process of Canonization – and that is the final section right near the bottom.

As we look at this first page, I would remind you that this was taken directly from the online edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia. The web address is listed in the citation down at the bottom. This is document approved by the Catholic Church, and I have done nothing to change it. This is the actual process for becoming a saint. As we look at this page, then, I want to point out something: Have you noticed that in these two full

pages of fine print that there is something missing? As far as I can tell, in these two pages there is not a single reference to scripture! There is not a single quote. Neither is there even a reference. I would just point out, then, that this process is completely man-made. This whole process concerning how to become a saint is made up! There is no scriptural support for it whatsoever. This is not in the Bible.

I would go back, then, to the question from one of the children of this congregation: What does the Bible teach concerning saints? Based on what we have learned already, I would suggest that what the Bible teaches and what the Roman Catholic Church teaches are two very different questions. And I say this with all respect for our friends in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, in some ways, has done a lot of good in this world. We think of the mass slaughter of more than 55 million innocent children that continues to take place in this nation: The Catholic Church has been leading the opposition against it. We think of the current administration's insistence that employers must provide abortion-inducing drugs to their employees. The Catholic Church has been a leading voice of opposition. We respect them for that. However, because we agree on some issues does not mean that we need to ignore those issues (like sainthood) where we part ways.

So we get back to the question: What is a saint? The word "saint" goes back to a Greek word referring to someone who is holy or set apart. If you were here a month or so ago for our lesson from Isaiah, then you might remember how those four creatures in Isaiah 6 were gathered around the throne and were constantly saying "**Holy, Holy, Holy.**" I pointed out then that the word "**holy**" basically means, "separate." A holy person is someone who is separate. A holy person has been set apart for a special purpose, and the word "saint" is just another way of referring to someone who is holy. It goes back to the same root word. We do not have the time to do an in-depth word study, so I have included two articles in this morning's handout that do give some additional information concerning the background of the word "saint." Basically, though, it is part of a word family that includes the words "sanctify," "holy," and "consecrate." A saint, then, is simply a holy person, a person who has been set apart. As I understand it, the word "saint" is found more than 60 times in the New Testament, and in every case, the word refers to Christians who were very much alive!

In the book of Acts, for example, we read in Acts 9:13 that Saul had persecuted the "**saints**" in Jerusalem. In Acts 9:32, Peter traveled to see the "**saints**" who were living in the village of Lydda. In Acts 9:41, Peter raised Tabitha from the dead and then called the "**saints**" in and presented her alive. In Romans 1:7, Paul opens the book and addresses it to the "**saints**" in Rome. In Romans 12:13, Paul tells us that we are to contribute to the needs of the "**saints.**" The book of Corinthians is addressed to the "**saints**" in Corinth. The book of Colossians was address to the "**saints**" in the city of Colossae. In the next-to-the-last verse in Hebrews, the writer of that book tells the readers to greet the leaders and the "**saints**" in that congregation. We could go on and on, but it is clear from the scriptures, 1.) That these saints were very much alive at the time they were called saints, and 2.) It is also clear that these were not people who went through any kind of 20-step process in order to be referred to as saints. But rather, it is clear from the Scriptures that a saint is simply a Christian. A saint is someone who is set apart. A saint is someone who is holy.

With all of this in mind as background, I would invite you to turn with me to a passage in 1 Peter 2, a passage where the apostle Peter describes what it really means to live as holy people in a very unholy world. The passage is 1 Peter 2:4-12 (p. 1895). We have learned what a saint is – a saint is us – so now we consider how a saint actually lives. 1 Peter 2:4-12...

⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶

For this is contained in Scripture: BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE, ⁸ and, A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. ⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

As we think about these nine verses and as we think about what it means to live as saints, I would like for us to keep our Bibles open, and I would like for us to come away with several lessons that apply to our saintly living.

- I. **And I know there are many lessons we can learn from these verses – we could study this paragraph for months – but I would like for us to notice, first of all, that WE AS SAINTS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD AROUND US.**

And to illustrate how we as saints are different, the apostle Peter paints a picture for us in verses 4-8: As saints, he compares us to *“living stones”* being built up as a spiritual house. Sometimes, of course, the church is described in the Bible as a family – God is our Father, we are the children, we are all brothers and sisters. Sometimes the church is described as a kingdom – God is the King, we are the citizens of his kingdom. Other passages describe the church as a body – Christ is the head, we are the body, unified, working together. But in this passage, we as saints are described as *“living stones”* being built up into a spiritual house. And, as living stones, we are all different, we are unique, we are set apart, we are holy, we are saints. And as the church grows, new people are constantly being added to this massive building where Jesus Christ serves as the Corner Stone.

And let us not forget that the very first time Jesus used the word *“church,”* he compared the church to a building. Jesus was a carpenter by trade, and in Matthew 16 Jesus said, *“Upon this rock, I will build my church.”* Jesus was referring to Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Paul uses a similar picture in Ephesians 2:19-22 where he says, *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”*

When I think of a house, I think of the home we built on the southwest side of Madison 13 years ago. There was a time when the materials that are now in our home were scattered and were quite meaningless on their own. At one time, the framing of the house was growing in the form of a tree somewhere. The wood was then stacked in a lumberyard. The nails and screws had not yet been mined out of the earth. The carpet was on a huge roll in a warehouse. The lighting fixtures were boxed up and waiting to be shipped from the

manufacturer. There was a time when the concrete and gravel were sitting in a large pile somewhere. And yet the time came when all of these very different elements came together and are now the house where we live – a place we call home, and a place where lives are being changed. The same thing is true of God’s building, the church. There was a time in the past when all of us here this morning were separate. At one time, those of us now gathered here this morning had very little in common – different economic situations, different ethnic backgrounds, different politics, different priorities, different interests. We were all doing our own thing when we were called by God to be separate, and holy, and different from the world around us. We are now joined together as a temple to God, with Jesus Christ as the Corner Stone. We fit together so well, because we are different from the world. We are saints. And that is the point Peter is making in 1 Peter 2 – as Christians, we are saints, we are different, but we fit together in the church.

II. **There is a second idea we need to consider here, and that is: WE ARE DIFFERENT BECAUSE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

And I would point out here that these descriptions in verses 9-10 are only true because of our relationship with God. Peter begins by saying that we are a **“chosen race.”** As I understand the concept of being chosen, God has decided that those in the church will be saved. He wants all people to be saved. But it is up to us whether we are in the church. I’m thinking of 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, where Paul said, **“But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul then went on to say in verse 15, **“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”** So, all people are called through the gospel, but only certain people will accept it, and once we do accept it, we must be careful to hold on to what we have heard. In that way, we are a **“chosen race.”**

Notice in verse 9, Peter also says that we are a **“royal priesthood.”** As saints, as Christians, we are part of a royal family. We have a relationship! We are also priests. In the Lord’s church we have no concept of clergy and laity. But instead, since all of us are priests, we have direct access to God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ. As saints, as holy men and women of God, we have no need of a human go-between. Having a priest go to God on my behalf would be like me hiring someone to diet and exercise on my behalf. It does me no good. But instead, each individual Christian has the ability and the responsibility to go to God directly.

Peter also said in verse 9 that we are a **“holy nation”** and a **“people for God’s own possession.”** Again, this also gets back to our relationship with God. As saints, we are special because God is our Father. When a father holds his newborn child and says “I love you,” the message is clear: Out of all of the children in the world, there may be one out there somewhere that is healthier, or smarter, or better behaved, but you are special because you are mine! In a similar way, we are different from the world because of our relationship with our Father in heaven.

We know that a very ordinary thing has a way of becoming valuable if it has been owned by a famous person. We can walk through a house in Springfield, Illinois (as we have done), and we can see a shaving mirror mounted six feet off the floor. That small mirror means nothing...until we realize that it is the exact mirror, mounted in the same place, hanging on the same nail, as when it was used by Abraham Lincoln. Ordinary things take on great value when they are owned by important people. The same thing is true in our relationship with God. We are different because we are a **“chosen race, a royal priesthood, holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.”**

III. **As we move along to verses 11-12 we find that Peter gets very practical. We've already learned that we are different because of our relationship with God, and now we learn that as saints, OUR DIFFERENTNESS IS A TESTIMONY TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT YET HOLY.**

Notice in verse 11: Peter describes us as being "*aliens and strangers.*" As a saint, I am an "*alien*"! As a saint, I am different – and I do not mean different like Rick Kramer who sat next to me in 1st grade and ate glue right out of the bottle – not that kind of different! But as a saint, I am so different that I really do not belong here! As a saint, I am so different that the people around me should want to be different as well. And so as we are here, our job is to stay away from those lusts that "*wage war against the soul.*" And the reason for maintaining this constant struggle against the world is so that we can serve as examples. As saints, our job is to show the people around us what Christian living is all about.

And so the question is: Could someone look at our lives and come to the conclusion that God is real, that Jesus is his Son, and that the Bible is true? One of my roommates in college had a poster on the wall, and the poster said, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" That's a good question! If the Dane County District Attorney brought us up on charges of being a Christian, exactly what kind of evidence would he bring up in the trial? Would he be able to make the case? If our coworkers were called in to testify, would they be willing to take the stand to say with confidence, "Yes, this person is a Christian"? If the DA were to pull up our phone records and our bank records, would he be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that we used our time and our finances in the living out of our Christian faith? If he were to put our children on the stand, would they be willing to make the case that we lived our lives (even in private) in a way that is consistent with Christian principles?

Peter tells us to keep our behavior "*excellent*" so that even outsiders will be able to "*glorify God.*" The idea is: When people see the way we live, they need to be saying to themselves, "Wow! I want to be a part of that!" As saints, our faith is to be attractive. On the job, we are to be the most honest and the hardest working employee. As managers, we are to be known as being fair and levelheaded. As students, we are to be cooperative and well behaved. As neighbors, we are to be known as those who will step in to help in a time of need. As members of this congregation, we are spread out over a very wide area, and most of us do not see each other outside of our worship and class assemblies. It is very important, then, that we as saints stay strong during the week and that we keep our behavior excellent. As saints, our goal is for others to see our behavior and to glorify God because of what they see in us. As saints, Peter says, we are examples!

Conclusion:

As we close, I would first of all like to thank the awesome kids of this congregation for coming up with such great questions! Often, kids are willing to ask questions that most of us have wondered about but that few of us will actually take the time to research. So, we are thankful for the good and honest hearts among the kids of this congregation. Because one of us had the courage to ask, all of us now know that saints are different. We know that we are different because of our relationship with God. And we now know that we are different for the purpose of living as examples to those who live around us.

But secondly, as we close, I would like to offer an invitation – an invitation to be added as a living stone in God's temple. I know we discussed this earlier, but I would emphasize here at the end that Jesus is the Chief Corner Stone. Today, most buildings start out with a poured concrete foundation (and there are many advantages to that – to start with, the building starts out perfectly level), but 2000 years ago, buildings started out with a corner stone, a rather large stone that was placed at the corner of a building and served to set the

angle of the entire building. All other stones were then laid in keeping with the angle of that stone. With that picture in mind, Jesus is the Chief Corner Stone. He is the One who sets the angle, He is the one who declares what is level, and then we as saints are added to that building as living stones. We are added to God's building at the same time that we are born into his family, when we are buried with Christ in baptism. The Lord Jesus died for our sins. We respond by seeing and understanding how bad sin really is. We have a change of heart. We turn away from sin. And then we allow ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of sins. As Peter will go on to explain in the next chapter, baptism saves us – not that we are actually scrubbing off sins with the water – but he explains that baptism is how we make our appeal to God for a good conscience. If you have any questions, please let us know, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com