

TITLE: "UR the Church"

TEXT: I Peter 2:1-12 (NT p. 233)

Introduction – Who's in charge?

This morning we are celebrating church membership and I want to begin with a story.

Christian Herter, then governor of Massachusetts, was running hard for a second term. After a busy schedule campaigning with no chance for lunch, he arrived at a church barbeque famished. As he moved down the line, the governor held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.

"Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "but do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?"

"Sorry," the woman replied, "I'm only supposed to give one piece to each person."

The governor was not a proud man, but he was hungry, so he decided to throw a little weight around. "Lady, do you know who I am? I'm the governor of this state."

She said, "Do you know who I am?" "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken!"

In this world where politicians are in the news, where adults who can play a kid's game of baseball earn millions a year and people who can act like someone else live in huge Hollywood mansions, it's good to remember Jesus' words: "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Mt 19:30).

In the end, a lot of the claims to fame people have now will be worthless and those who have faith in Jesus Christ ...priceless. Church membership is important, and there are three messages for church members in our text:

1. Abstain from the desires of the flesh.
2. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles.
3. Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.

1. Abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul

God tells us to “abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.” What does this mean? It means that it is not always easy to be a church member. Being a church member takes commitment; commitment to Jesus Christ and commitment to those who are in church.

These days, most people do not want another commitment. They feel enough pressure from family, from work and from other responsibilities. What people want now is freedom. Freedom to do what they want to do, freedom to escape from the pressures of life in one way or another.

Freedom from commitment is an illusion. That is why Jesus says, only “...if the Son [of God] makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). We will always have commitments and they will be waiting for us whenever we return from our chosen means of escape. But when we are committed to Jesus, we can prioritize our commitments and they become manageable.

Let me tell you a story. I was out in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico on a shrimp boat when a storm hit. The wind shrieked, the rain poured down and the water from the waves we drove through swept along the deck in a torrent. As I looked out from the wheelhouse, I saw birds, land birds, clinging to the rail. I guess they had been caught by the wind and blown out to sea.

They were so exhausted that they were having a hard time holding on. So I put on my slicker and went out to rescue them. They didn't understand that I wanted to help and tried to move away from me along the rail. But I carefully picked them up, one by one, and put them in a box on the back deck in the lee of the wind. When the storm was over, and we were closer to land, I picked them up and they flew away.

That's what God did for me, and what God does for all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. When we try to gain freedom from commitment to the Lord, the storms of life just beat us down. But when we fall exhausted into the loving hands of God, God picks us up, takes care of us, and sets us free to fly to new heights. And when we are freed by Jesus, we are free indeed.

2. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles

The second thing God tells us to do is to conduct ourselves honorably. As Christians, we are to have ethical standards that are above what are expected by most people. Why? So people who are not Christians will know that Jesus Christ does make a difference in a person's life. Let me give you two illustrations.

When our twin children were born, we found we needed a second car. We had a lot of expenses and very little money. The vice president of the company I worked told me he was selling his Ford Pinto wagon. Eric was active in his church, and when he told me that the car was in very good shape, I trusted him.

It was soon painfully obvious that the car had some serious problems. A technician who worked for him told me that Eric knew about these problems and then said, "No one who knows Eric would buy anything from him."

Last week, Carol and I rented a small cottage on the Outer Banks. It was a great little home, with a view of the sea over a sand dune across the street. One thing that the real estate people purposely omitted to tell us was that it was Bike Week.

Bike Week means that thousands of motorcycles, most of them loud, descended upon the area. Stores and restaurants were filled with bikers. There were traffic jams caused by masses of bikes. Even on the beach, you could hear the constant noise of bikers revving their engines. Bikes roared up and down the street in front of our cottage all day and throughout the night.

While we were there, we happened to meet the couple who owned the cottage. It turns out they are members of a Presbyterian church in Norfolk, Virginia. They were distressed to hear that we hadn't been told about Bike Week. They were also sorry that they changed phone services and had workmen in our cottage some of the time.

While we were packing up to leave last Sunday, they came over and said that because of bike week, and all the trouble with the phone, we were to be their guests at the cottage next April.

If you were not a Christian, and had had the same encounters with Eric who intentionally sold me the car from hell, or this couple who gave us a free week at their cottage, which church would you want to go to?

3. Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house

The final point of our text this morning is to let yourself be built into a spiritual house.

What does this mean?

Join the church.

Come to adult SS or Thursday Bible study.

Join the choir.

Bring others to church with you.

There are a lot of hurting people who want what you have, which is faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you another story.

Every Sunday afternoon, after the morning service at the church, the Pastor and his eleven year old son would go out into their town and hand out Gospel Tracts.

This particular Sunday afternoon, it was very cold outside and rain was pouring down.

The boy bundled up in his warmest and driest clothes and said, 'OK, dad, I'm ready.'

Dad said, 'Son, I am not going out in this weather.'

Despondently, the boy asks, 'Dad, can I go? Please?'

His father hesitated for a moment then said, 'Son, you can go. Here are the tracts. Be careful son.'

After two hours of walking in the rain, the boy was soaking wet and down to his VERY LAST TRACT. He stopped on a corner and looked for someone to hand a tract to, but the streets were totally deserted. Then he turned toward the first home he saw and started up the sidewalk to the front door and rang the door bell, but nobody answered.

He rang it again and again, but still no one answered. He waited but still no answer. Finally, he turned to leave, but something stopped him. Again, he turned to the door and rang the bell and knocked loudly on the door with his fist. He waited, something holding him there on the front porch! He rang again and this time the door slowly opened.

Standing in the doorway was a very sad-looking elderly lady. She softly asked, 'What can I do for you, son?' With radiant eyes and a smile that lit up her world, this little boy said, 'Ma'am, I'm sorry if I disturbed you, but I just want to tell you that JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU and I came to give you my very last Gospel Tract which will tell you all about JESUS and His great LOVE.'

Well, the following Sunday morning in church Pastor Dad was in the pulpit. As the service began, he asked, 'Does anybody have testimony or want to say anything?'

Slowly, in the back row of the church, an elderly lady stood to her feet. As she began to speak, a look of glorious radiance came from her face, 'No one in this church knows me. I've never been here before. You see, before last Sunday I was not a Christian. My husband passed on some time ago, leaving me totally alone in this world.'

Last Sunday, being a particularly cold and rainy day, it was even more so in my heart and I came to the end of the line where I no longer had any hope or will to live. So I took a rope and a chair and ascended the stairway into the attic of my home. I fastened the rope securely to a rafter in the roof, then stood on the chair and fastened the other end of the rope around my neck. I was about to leap off, when the ringing of my doorbell downstairs startled me. I thought, 'I'll wait a minute, and whoever it is will go away...'

I waited and waited, but the ringing doorbell seemed to get louder and more insistent, and then the person ringing also started knocking loudly... I thought to myself again, 'Who on earth could this be? Nobody ever rings my bell or comes to see me.' I loosened the rope from my neck and started for the front door.

When I opened the door and looked I could hardly believe my eyes, for there on my front porch was the most radiant and angelic little boy I had ever seen in my life. The words that came from his mouth caused my heart that had long been dead, TO LEAP TO LIFE as he said, 'Ma'am, I just came to tell you that JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU.' Then he gave me this Gospel Tract that I now hold in my hand. It had the name of your church on the back, so here I am.

Conclusion – UR the Church

There are a lot of hurting people who want what you have, which is faith in Jesus Christ. If God brings a hurting person into your life, share your faith, bring the person to church, invite the person to come with you to youth group.

You are the Church.

You are God's spiritual house.

You are the only Bible most people will ever read.

You are as close to Jesus as most people will ever get.

Amen.

TEXT: I Peter 2:1-12

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 [Jesus], 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, [Jesus] 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.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.