

Read Archbishop Justin's reflections on 1 Peter in this second Bible exposition at the Lambeth Conference today, on the theme of 'A Holy People following Christ'. The journey through 1 Peter will explore a range of themes including belonging, alienation, exile, slavery and persecution, hospitality, mission and reconciliation.

Come Holy Spirit, Come Holy Spirit of God who inspired the scriptures and open our hearts to Your Word. Amen.

As part of today's exposition, we will hear some conversations between three of our brothers and sisters on what it means to be the people in God's church today. Deliberately, they represent a radical difference in context, emphasising the diversity of those who are gathered here to listen together and walk together. But all of them are asking a question that comes directly from 1 Peter 2:1-12 which is our focus this morning.

How do we be holy, how are we holy in the face of the challenges we face? Because holiness, and the call to be holy is a central theme of 1 Peter 2, and in fact of the whole letter of 1 Peter. But before Peter can turn to this call to holiness (or return to it because it's in 1 Peter 1) he begins to unpack some of the consequences of being a Christian. In 1 Peter 1, believers are called to faith, hope, and given a new identity. They're exiles, but they're given a new identity as God's people. Now in 1 Peter 2, Peter begins to unpack, unfold what that means for daily life. And, at its heart is - be different.

It begins with a warning against everything that undermines the unity of the church, and the mutual love, that we are to show one for the other. And listen to these words, because when I hear them, my own heart is convicted and I feel a sense of grief. He tells us to avoid guile, that is clever, political, manoeuvring, malice, envy, slander, insincerity, and abandoning those things is the consequence of loving one another and being born again.

They take us into a new form of life, as well as a new life. And then he expands on our identity by introducing the language of the living stone. Jesus is described with that title in chapter 2:4, and those who believe in Jesus, Christians, are also given that title in verse 5. And the language of living therefore, in chapter 2, applies not only to our living hope, which lives and is prepared for us, or to God's living word, but also to God's people. We have gone from death to life. But we are stones.

And the reason for that is that living stones are those stones that are not yet quarried. They have not yet been taken out of the quarry. They are still growing, they are still being shaped by the elements. They are still acquiring sediment. It's an image that is found throughout the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 8:14, or 28:16, in the Psalms 118:22. And as elsewhere in the New Testament, Peter draws on the Old Testament, and shapes the interpretation in the light of the church's experience of faith in Jesus Christ. Believers in Jesus inherit the calling and join in the calling that God gave to Israel to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's own people.

In the holy lands, Palestine, especially - and I'm just looking at Archbishop Hosam to see if he shakes his head or nods his head - Christians, I've heard, refer them to themselves as living stones, because people go to the Holy Land to see the dead stones; to see the buildings, the Holy Sepulchre, and church and the Nativity and all the other stuff. But we so often forget the living stones, who are the people of God, and they are so often ignored by the pilgrims, and directly connected to this call to be a living stone and to love one another. Believers in Jesus are called to proclaim the great deeds of God in verse 10.

And throughout the Old Testament, Psalm 51, for example, worship, forgiveness and witness are always linked. If we worship, it's because we're forgiven, if we worship it leads us into witness. So basically Peter says, believers should live in a way that the unbelievers, among whom they live, should see them and glorify God.

Peter continues with a message of hope and holiness: hope, because his community should feel heartened that hope is stored up for them, and that they will be vindicated when Christ returns, and holiness because God's pick is holy, and therefore, his people are wholly different.

So I think we are now going to go to hear some reflections on holiness, and to listen to how holy living and this call to holiness is understood across our communion.

'And so holiness is to me the wooing rather old fashioned word, the wooing of a sort of Christ, like integrity, that draws us more into the presence and the being of God, and encourage ourselves to take others on that journey to.'

'You have to be God's light, you have to be Christ like, and that is the holiness for me.'

'Basically, from where I come from holiness is mostly associated with not being corrupt.'

'Holiness is something that I am aspiring to, according to me. Holiness is a kind of being one with what you say.'

'For me, holiness is living by example. Being considerate to others, and their needs, and being a light in darkness, radiating the light of Christ. And to me, it is a privilege of living as a people set aside, or set apart. And longing for the power of the Holy Spirit to work within me to produce a godly character and conduct.'

'Having a personal relationship with God, and that relationship extending to our fellow human beings, respecting the rights of individuals, respecting individuals means looking at individuals, as people created in the image of God.'

'Taking risks. So all people are loved and treated fairly. That's holiness.'

'Holiness is about being actively committed in the imitation of God, in God's self-sacrificial movement towards the other, which is found in Jesus Christ.'

Because when God comes close to something, he, God transforms all that is not holy, into the holy because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. So we are called and our ethical framework and our system within the Christian community in the Anglican Communion is to be moving close to those to the unholy in our world, so that through us it may be transformed. That's what the last testimony was saying. In other words, it's not about performative piety, nor is holiness, something we can manufacture for ourselves and make for ourselves.'

It is the gift of the grace of God, it is given by God and God alone. Holiness is the movement of God. And it leads to transformation. And that is really good news for us. Because I don't know about you. But on the whole, I find it easy to be unholy. Maybe all of you here find it difficult to be unholy. And that's why you are Bishops, I'm not with you on that one!

I find it easy to be unholy. And too often we look for the holy in certain characteristics. But because it's the grace of God, it means that the marginalised, the weak, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, the children, can all be holy, because it is grace. It's not works. People with very severe disabilities or very severe learning difficulties can be holy that's the point of the L'Arche communities, they can be holy people.

And as we look at this theme across 1 Peter, it is explained by the single marvellous act of God, that He calls us out of darkness into light, he turns nobodies into a nation, he gives divine forgiveness, to the unforgiven. Holiness is supremely shown. In God coming close to the unholy, Romans 5:8 God proves his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Holiness in 1 Peter is God's sovereign transformation - stones become living, those who were not a people are God's people. Those who are scattered, strangers and lost become a nation. Holiness calls us to look at the other, not only to the holy, within the church - but to the unholy, both inside and outside the church. But it is difficult.

Why in the Old Testament, why in Leviticus, and why throughout the Old Testament are we meant to be hospitable, most beautifully seen in Ruth, because you, says God to the Israelites, were exiled strangers, and aliens. Holiness cares for each other, there is a massive challenge. Holiness is not just toleration. And the result, though, in Christian history is when we talk about holiness, we have found that people have begun to weaponise holiness to turn it into a weapon - a stick with which to hit people. When we think we know who is holy and who is not, holiness, the decision as to who is holy is often historically given to people in power in the church - Bishops, Archbishops, leaders of the church - to exclude that which is not holy. And such a view raises questions about the powers of inclusion and exclusion. For what makes one person holy and thus included, is not human action. It is divine grace and human response.

Go back to Deuteronomy, chapter 14:2 - Moses says, for you are a people, to the Israelites, holy to the Lord your God, the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. So in other words, the boundary between inclusion and exclusion is set by God. Only God can determine what is holy and who is holy, what does it mean for us, as Christians as Anglicans in the ways that we exclude and include in as Bishops? What does it mean for us as a church and a communion when we separate ourselves from one another, right across the Christian faith, or within the Anglican Communion? Because we have decided who is and who is not holy?

How often do we make holy our way of being, by claiming it from God, stealing it from God? And we use it then to exclude others, for whatever reason, because we fear them - because of their gender, because of their race. Didn't we do that in the Church of England for centuries, and still do in some places, because of their race because of their sexuality, because of their marital status, whatever it happens to be?

The language of holiness, when it depends on the theology we hold in terms of God's actions, and ours, encourages extreme stances, both of inclusion and exclusion. It doesn't go to God and ask who is holy? We only need to think of Acts 10, where it took a vision from God to convince Peter that what God has made clean, you must not call profane. And just remember, he wasn't told it once. He had to be told it three times before the penny dropped.

Peter never says that holiness means one must separate oneself from people who are not holy. Because when we do that, we conflate, we confuse, holiness with purity, and they are not the same thing. And yet, there are places in our Communion and in the history of the Church of England and other churches, and churches around the world today, where holiness is purity. And where single mothers are not holy, people of different sexual identities are not holy, people who are not married are not holy. Peter and Leviticus are clear that holiness is not something over which we have power or control. It is the movement of God.

Jesus is the one who makes unholy holy. Think of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was the ultimate unholy - that's why Luke brings him up. He was small. I think that's quite holy, personally. But you may call that a controversial view. He was small, a bit like me. And he was a tax collector, not at all like me. And he was a bit of a thief, not really like me, and so on and so forth. Does Jesus walk past the tree? No he says, Zacchaeus come down, I'm coming to your house. In every way Jesus is making himself impure, because he's going to the house of someone who's considered unholy. And the result is that they become holy.

Holiness is the movement of God. We might separate ourselves because we have judged that we are unholy. But we are forgiven by God, or we've judged another, but they are forgiven by God. That call of the Christian is to live on the very front line of holiness. So we can reach over the frontier and draw people into the love of Christ. Christ became sin for us. In order to draw the world. A person is holy, the church is holy, a community is holy, only because Christ is in the middle of it. Peter always goes back to Christ as the one who is holy, the one who makes us holy. And therefore, holiness is not about us. It's about the actions of God.

Of course, as Bishops, we are responsible for discipline, for disciplining. To create space where holiness can grow, and for guidance to others, to God, who is holy. We need to remember that Peter addresses not just individuals, he mainly addresses communities. And in our communities, we find people who say 'put up a wall, keep the unholy separate.' But that is not what Peter says. He says, 'Go out, engage, transform'. We are to declare the wonderful works of God. Jesus's incarnation, and life and death, and resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit into an unholy world shows that separation is not the same as holiness. And so reflect, how do we walk together with those who are alien and

exiled? What would our communion, our church around the world, the Christian church look like if everyone was loved as a chosen person of God? What do we do when we separate ourselves from the other? What are we doing to ourselves and to them?

Christ starts with the church and with the Communion, not where we should be. But where we are, God comes to us. But when that happens, what does that say to us? It must call us when God, when Christ, comes to us. He comes in transformation, transforming love. But when He comes to us, that calls us to repentance - to change.

And in our Bible studies, I hope we share what that means for us for reconciliation, for relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. We are divided by many things. How do we come together as God's holy people as one in Christ? How do we listen to one another's stories? There's a course we run at Lambeth called the Difference Course. Not written by me, but written by others at Lambeth. I do warmly commend it to you. I did it last summer, and have found it enormously helpful. And there's a sort of guide to it in a book of sorts that I wrote earlier this year on reconciliation. The last three chapters are quite good because they're helped by people who wrote the Difference Course.

It talks about the habits of reconciliation, and it says that we are not really listening to people unless we can tell their story in a way that they recognise as their story. That's what reconciliation with brothers and sisters in Christ looks like. We don't have to agree with them. But we have to be able to tell them their story in a way that they say yes, that is my story. And we can say I don't agree with what you're saying, but I understand.

So how do we listen to each other? How do we understand ourselves and our communion? As living stones, God's holy people. Let's close with a prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. Let the fire of your coming, fill us and consume in us those things that are not holy. Let it be your conviction that calls us to repentance and change, your conviction coming in breath-taking, overwhelming, generous, overflowing, abundant love. Let it be your conviction, not the imposition that we put on others. As Bishops, give us strength to be those who do not weary in seeking your presence. Because you do not weary in coming to us and transforming us. Amen.

And just one final story. When I was giving a sermon that in a mission, diocesan mission, evangelistic mission in England on one occasion, some years ago, now seven years ago, in the course of it, I was talking about sin and the need to repent. And I said we are all sinners, you are sinners, I am a sinner. After the service, a lady came up to me and said, I didn't know you were a sinner. It gets worse. If I'd known you were a sinner, I would not have come today.

Through prayer, Bible study, fellowship and discussion, the conference community will explore what it means for the Anglican Communion to be responsive to the needs of our 21st Century world. Read 1 Peter and find out more about the theme and biblical focus [here](#).

