

May 3, 2026 – 1 Peter 2:2-10

Years ago, back in seminary, I remember one of my professors telling us a story. It was about an LCMS pastor. He was an older pastor, not far from retirement, serving a rather large congregation. But, unfortunately, neither his age, nor his position had made him much wiser. In fact, this pastor was really quite arrogant.

And this professor and this pastor got into a discussion about preaching. About the content of Lutheran preaching. And the professor made a comment about making sure that the Gospel was at the center of our preaching. That Christ crucified and risen from the dead is fundamental to everything we preach. That the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life is essential in every sermon.

And the pastor just laughed at him. He said, “Oh, I used to preach that way too. But I've grown past that. Our congregation has grown past that. I'll still give a sermon like that on Christmas or Easter, but most of the time, what people need to hear is preaching about the law. About how to live as a Christian. That's what spiritually mature believers need.”

Obviously, the professor thought this pastor was wrong. Obviously, I think this pastor was wrong. But it does bring up an interesting question: What does spiritual maturity look like? How do we reach spiritual maturity? And what do we do when we get there?

And that's very much the topic of our Epistle today. This is actually a topic that St Peter brought up at the very beginning of his letter. But then, he kinda gets sidetracked on a slightly different topic. And now he's circling back around to it.

Because all the way back in chapter 1 verse 3, Peter tells us that we have been born again into a living hope. That's where Peter began. That's where you began as a Christian. Not with your decision, but with God's action. He caused you to be born again. He gave you life where there was death. He gave you hope where there was none.

And now, in our text today, Peter moves forward from that point. Because if God has caused you to be born again, then how do you live in this reborn life? What does it mean to grow? What does spiritual maturity actually look like?

And as the pastor I spoke of a moment ago proved, we're often tempted to answer that question in the completely wrong way. We think maturity means independence. Strength. Stability. Having everything figured out. Being less needy. Learning God's Law and God's commands so that we can take care of ourselves.

But Peter says something very different. *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.”* That's his picture of growth. Not less dependence, but more. Not moving beyond need, but recognizing it more clearly. Not outgrowing nourishment, but longing for it.

That's how the Christian life works. The more alive you are, the more you hunger. The more you have tasted that the Lord is good, the more you want what He gives. Spiritual maturity isn't graduating from the Gospel. It's clinging to it all the more. It's learning to depend more completely on what God gives than what you can produce.

The newborn child doesn't apologize for its hunger. It cries out. It receives. It lives from what it's given. The same is true for you. You grow by receiving. You grow by being fed. You grow by what God does for you. And that already turns on its head much of what we assume about maturity.

But Peter doesn't stop with the image of an infant. He paints yet another picture for us. *“As you come to him, a living stone... you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.”* This is still an image of growth and development. But instead of the biological growth of a child, we have the construction of a building.

But there are still a lot of similarities. Because, even as a building, you are being built. You're not building yourself. You're not assembling your own identity. You're not constructing your own spiritual life. You are being built by a divine builder. By the one who built all of creation. He is taking the raw material, the dust of the earth from which you came, and building you into something new.

And what are you being built into? You're being built into a house. A dwelling place. But this house isn't being built out of you alone. No, you're being built into a spiritual house together with all the other believers around you. Which means that your spiritual maturity isn't something that's just between you and God. It's between you and God and the Church around you.

We often imagine maturity as standing on our own. Being self-sufficient. Needing no one. But God builds differently. He sets you into a structure. He joins you to others. He makes you part of something larger than yourself.

And the cornerstone, the one that determines the shape of the whole building and the strength of the entire structure, is Jesus Christ. Rejected by men, but chosen and precious in the sight of God.

And that means something for you as well. Because Peter says: *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone... and a stone of stumbling."* There are only two ways to relate to this stone. Either you are built on Him, or you stumble over Him. Either He is your foundation, or He is your offense. There's no neutral ground.

And this too is part of spiritual maturity. To be firmly set on Christ. Without compromise. Without redefining Him to fit the world's expectations. Because the world still rejects Him. Still stumbles over Him. Still finds Him offensive.

A crucified Savior. A Lord who gives Himself in weakness. A kingdom that comes through death and resurrection. This isn't impressive to the world. It's a stumbling block. But to you who believe, He is precious.

And that brings Peter to one of the most striking descriptions in the New Testament. *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession."* Chosen. Royal. Holy. His own. This is what you are because God has claimed you.

This is identity language. Covenant language. Language once spoken about Israel, now fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ. You are these things. God has made you these things. Therefore live in them.

That's is how God works. He names you first. He gives you that baptismal identity of one washed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And then He calls you to live in what He has already made you to be.

A royal priesthood. You're part of the royal family. Which means you have access to the king. You're a priest. One who stands in the presence of God without fear.

A holy nation. Set apart. Not defined by the world's categories, but by God's Word. A people for His possession. You belong to Him. Completely and unconditionally.

And why has He done this? *"That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* That's the purpose of your spiritual growth. Both as individuals and as a church built up together.

Your purpose, our purpose together, is it to declare what He has done. You were in darkness. He called you out. You were blind. He gave you light. You were dead. He made you alive. Just as he rose from the dead.

And then Peter says something that ties everything together. Something that reaches back into the Old Testament and shows us the fullness of what God has done: *"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."*

Our Thursday morning Bible study group might recognize this language. Because this is taken directly from the prophet Hosea. God had told the prophet to name his children with names of judgment. "Not my people." "No mercy." Their names were a declaration of what sin had done. How their sin had separated God's people from himself.

But even there, in Hosea, God had already promised restoration. He had promised a day when those who were "not my people" would be called "my people." When those who deserved "no mercy" would receive mercy.

And now Peter says: That day has come. In Christ, the restoration is complete. What you were is not what you are. You were not a people. Now you are God's people. You had not received mercy. Now you have received mercy.

So what does spiritual maturity look like? It looks like a child who knows where to be fed. It looks like a stone that stays where it has been placed. It looks like a priest who trusts the sacrifice that has already been made. It looks like a people who know who they are because God has said it.

Maturity isn't moving beyond dependence on Christ. Quite the opposite. It's becoming even more deeply dependent on his grace. It's not outgrowing the Gospel. It's living more fully within it. It's not becoming self-sufficient by works of the Law. It's becoming more firmly rooted in all the Gospel blessings that God gives.

You have been born again into a living hope. And that life doesn't sustain itself. It's sustained by the One who gave it. That is your beginning. That is your spiritual maturity. And that is your hope for all eternity. Amen.