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Title: *"Just Who Will You Be?"*

Texts: Ps. 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10

**Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16**

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,  
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

My times are in your hand;  
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.  
Let your face shine upon your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love.

## 1 Peter 2:2-10

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 him, 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, he 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.

A few years back journalist Maria Shriver wrote a book called "Just Who Will You Be?" In the book she says: "The most important question we can ask ourselves throughout our lives is "What do I believe? – and who do I want to be?" "Answering that question," she says "...is crucial, because

*what you believe* is the foundation upon which you build yourself as you continue to grow.”

I remember the excitement, and also the pressure of high school graduation! One thing I remember particularly was the pressure of declaring a major. The questions were not: “What do you believe? Or who will you be? The questions were: “What are you going to be when you grow up? What are you going to *do* with your life? What’s going to be *your major?*”

Most of you know that I first felt the call into ministry when I was in elementary school when I accompanied my dad to the nursing home. I saw the exchange between my father and the residents... and I knew: “Whatever I do with my life, I want to have this kind of impact on other people... I want this kind of authentic exchange to occur.”

I took me a while to name that authentic experience *ministry*.

What some of you may not know, I also considered being: a chef, a small business owner, a nurse, an occupational therapist, and a teacher.

Due to a very inspiring high school English teacher, Scott Ludtke, I went to college exploring the possibility of declaring an English major. Initially, my major was “undecided,” along with many other freshmen. At the start of college, I thought my calling was to teach high school or college English. Then, throughout my college experience, as I read the classics and even, can you believe it?! – controversial literature... I discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit calling me to be a Presbyterian Minister.

Often times I think our culture puts the focus in the wrong place. The question is often: “What do you want to be?” I like Maria Shriver’s question better: “Just who will you be?”

I like her question better because when you know the person that you want to be... every action... every building block... every skill that you develop along the way stems from your core, inner self which is motivated by your

beliefs and core values. Our Christian values... and mindset... says that life is not just about getting and spending. Life is not even all about achieving success. What is the chief end of man: to love God and enjoy God forever! The Holy Spirit inspires us to find a vocation – whatever it is – where we can “...live and move and have our being,” as it says in Acts! The Christian concept of success is faithfulness. I like what Mother Teresa said: “I do not pray for success, I ask for faithfulness.” The Christian vocation to which each of us is called is: to live a life of “faithfulness”.

Graduates! Doug, Caleb, Lesedi, David Grant, Lea, “Who will you be?” Who do you want to be? What is your belief that guides every thought, every action... every motivation in your life? What are the kinds of things that you want God and your community to see about your life? Our community of faith, our church, and our families, will be a little different this moment on. We send you out into the world with all the love, grace and hope we can offer. We pray that we have given you something to live by... something that will sustain you during times of grief and be present in times of deep joy and celebration.

This transition period among our youth marks a time of transition for us as a congregation as well. For in life, we are always graduating from something. A pastor friend of mine has a sign above his door which says: “The truly educated never graduate!” Russell Nunan, former pastor of this church, used to say at funerals that he/she has “graduated” and is now with God. Graduation always brings a mixture of feelings. Life has changed forever! –from this moment on! We can rekindle our memories from high school or the past, but never again can we actually live in those moments. We say goodbye to this particular moment in our lives... and we welcome new experiences in the present moment... and we celebrate our future. All of us... are sandwiched between past and future. I think it is most productive when we focus on the future. It is in the future where we have the opportunity to have an impact on our world and community. We should be spending more of our time welcoming the future than dwelling on the past. Perhaps that’s why John Lennon sang: “Hello! Hello, Hello! I don’t know why you say Goodbye, I say Hello!” Do not forget your past. It will forever be a part of you; it has shaped who you are! And now,

knowledgeable... and grateful... for past experiences, we welcome a future of joy and grace and opportunity.

If there is just one message I could leave with the graduates... and each one of us today... it would be this: *We are a people in desperate need... and dependent... on God. We need the Word of God, which helps us to live a life of faithfulness to God... and one another. The Word of God facilitates our "vocation" of faithfulness.* That's why our scripture passage from 1 Peter today connects the image of milk to notions of new birth and to the nourishing power of the word.

No matter your age, when it comes to the Christian faith, we are all babies! The particular Greek word for babies in this passage literally means: "nursing babies..." which accentuates that we depend on God just as a baby depends on her mother's milk. Without it we die! Thus we should "long for spiritual milk," just as babies long for their mother's milk.

There are days when I think we can convince ourselves that we don't need God... That we are self-made men and women... As if we could carve a sculpture of ourselves out of rock... to show off to all creation.

I remember, when I finished my second year of seminary, I thought I was practically invincible. I think my education was getting to my head... (that's what my parents told me anyway) and I couldn't wait to go out and *change the world*. I think I saw myself as a "self-made man"... in some moments during this time, and then I went to New Orleans to work as a chaplain for the New Orleans Police Department! This was one of the most unique, life-changing experiences of my entire life. The situation made me feel half-crazy at times. For instance, my parents always told me growing up to stay away from danger... and here I was driving towards terrifying and dangerous situations: homicide scenes, house fires, domestic violence. In practical situations of grief and suffering, knowledge of the doctrines can only help so much. I never quoted St. Augustine, John Calvin or Karl Barth. For the first time in my life, I was the pastor, the spiritual leader... for individuals at a crucial moment in time... in the depths of human suffering... and I did not always know what to do. I had to yield to the

Holy Spirit to instruct me how to act. I leaned on the community of chaplain supervisors and other staff chaplains to help me fine-tune my art of pastoral care... In these instances, I was brought back from my “self-made man” reality and realized anew that I still needed God... and I will need God... again... and again...

God is the source of our life. And God calls us to *want* this source! As we grow in our faith, we must increase our longing for the Word. We must want the word with the same absolute focus that a baby wants her mother’s milk! This spiritual milk, this word, enables us to “grow up to salvation,” as 1 Peter says. We will never outgrow a need for this milk. We will always be babies needing milk. There is never another source. Always, Jesus is the word which nourishes.

Graduates... People of God, “Just who will you be?”

Sometimes we go through transitions... life changes... and we have to redirect our identity – leaning on the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Maria Shriver is going through such changes as I’m sure you’ve heard in recent news. She is going through a devastating situation... which is immensely painful. I read in a recent article that one way she is getting through the situation is she is “wearing her journalist’s hat...” ... her first vocation before becoming the 1<sup>st</sup> lady of California. In a YouTube Video, she says: “It is so stressful to not know what you're doing next. I'd like to hear from other people in transition.... How did you get through it? What were three things that enabled you to get through your transition?” She is working to build her life back up again... and she is leaning on the community through the web to help her grow... and to heal.

People of God, Graduates! (by the way I’m talking to everyone here today): How are you going about building your lives of faith? Are you embracing your spiritual vocation of faithfulness? What buildingblocks will you use during this time of transition and change?

Remember to build your life, your community, your world with buildingblocks of peace... mercy... kindness... and love... Include buildingblocks from your family, your church... and, in our futures, we will need to include new buildingblocks. Be creative with your buildingblocks of life... for your body is your temple... and you can build however you want. However, sometimes you will find that there are some buildingblocks you might not want to include! I have a personal rule: I ask myself sometimes: Is this intention... this action... this idea or program rooted in love? If I decide it's not, the buildingblock is thrown away... There are times I have had to renovate and rebuild portions of my temple. Don't be afraid to knock down and rebuild. God will always graciously help you build and rebuild your temple.

1 Peter urges us, as you build, keep Jesus Christ the cornerstone of everything you build. Keeping Jesus as the cornerstone buildingblock of your temple will have a vital role in the health of the structure of your temple. This will always... and forever remain... a spiritual truth, for "Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8)

People of God, "Just who will you be?"

Toward the end of the text, 1 Peter tells us: "You are God's person." In some ways we don't become a child of God. We already are. The problem might be that we keep trying to be something else – something our parents or others told us we should be. Wanting the best for us, they tell us what we should become, doctor, lawyer, whatever..... You can do whatever you want to do. You can become a doctor, nurse, fireman, tight rope walker, preacher or chef. You can become all of those, but that is not who you are. You already are a child of God!

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." (1 John 3:1)

You are "God's own (person), in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into marvelous light." (1 Peter)