

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Epistle, Year A

IT'S FAITH IN FAIRNESS OR JESUS

1 Peter 2:2-10

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

2Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation– 3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5like 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. 6For 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." 7To 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," 8and "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. 9But 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. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

DIAGNOSIS: Faith Is in Fairness

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Life Isn't Fair Is the Complaint

Everybody expects (not hopes, but expects) that each day's events will be normal, not too much trouble, and that each day will contain some safety and health and food. We expect life to be reasonably good, not just for us but for everyone else, too. But the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1), are suffering various trials (1:6), and as a result are reacting with malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander (2:1). They do not want to accept the authority of human institutions (2:13). They are enduring a fiery ordeal (4:12). What the exiles are having most trouble with is having to suffer when they feel they have done no wrong. As people who trust Christ, they feel they should not have to suffer so much. Slaves are upset that they suffer harm for doing what they are told (2:20); the women in exile whose husbands do not trust Jesus object to being harshly treated and not as equal to their husband (as the Promise of Jesus has done away hierarchy, that in Christ there is no male and female, no slave and free); husbands abuse the status over their wives that society gives them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): If Life Isn't Fair, I Won't Be Fair

In all the trials, suffering, and fiery ordeal, the faith of the exiles, in their protests against having to suffer when they have only done what is right, is in the law of retribution, the law of fairness, the law of getting what you deserve. This is seen in 2:19-20, "For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval." Life is not working according to the expectations that faith in retribution would have. For as a parent of a child with cancer said, "My child shouldn't have this cancer. It's not fair. God doesn't care. What good is believing in God if my

child suffers?" (Of course, parents only protest like that when it is their child, and they say nothing when they hear of other children having cancer.) To have faith in fairness, to have faith in the promise that life will be somewhat normal, is faith that is not in Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Death Is Fair

With hearts set on life treating them with normalcy, with faith in retribution, what has happened is that the exiles have forgotten Jesus. They have rejected the cornerstone. Jesus has become a rock that makes them stumble, to drop the light of faith in Jesus and to stumble in the darkness of death.

PROGNOSIS: Faith Is in Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus' Death Is Not Fair

Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world with all its retribution and pains. Jesus suffered for us. "When he was abused, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness" (2:21-24). Jesus acted in a way that did not involve retribution, that was not fair, or about getting what was deserved. By his death and rising, Jesus brought to us his way of mercy, that is, to give us forgiveness as a gift, to give us his goodness as a gift, to give us eternal life as a gift. Retribution is not in charge anymore. It still rules this life, but not Christ or those who live in him.

Step 5. Advanced Prognosis (External Solution): As Life In Jesus Is Merciful, I Will Be Merciful

The exiles have been chosen by God to be obedient to Jesus (1:2). The exiles, by hearing the promises of Jesus that are for them, they have come to trust in God, who raised Jesus from the

dead and gave him glory, so that their faith and hope are now set on God (1:21). Faith in Jesus is what God declares as our goodness, righteousness, as the rock on which we stand. Now if the exiles suffer for doing what is right, they have God's approval. It is faith in Jesus that enables people to endure pain when suffering unjustly (2:19).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Life Is Merciful Is the Hope

With the exiles having their faith set on Jesus, they now have genuine love for one another instead of the malice, guile, and slander with which they were afflicting each other. Even more, they are now a royal priesthood, God's own people, that they may proclaim the mighty acts of Jesus who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (2:9). They were a people who had not received mercy, having lived trusting retribution, but now they have received mercy (2:10). They get to tell each other and anyone else of Jesus' unfair suffering and death to create for us life in him, a life that is managed with mercy—which is to give others Jesus' goodness instead of using retribution. Yes, those who trust Jesus still have the flesh that depends on retribution, that does not like being treated unfairly, that wants to demand justice for themselves. That flesh wants to overturn faith in Jesus (the desires of the flesh wage war against the soul, 2:11). But we who trust Christ get to act honorably, with kindness, mercy, when among the people of retribution, so that, though they malign us as evildoers, they may still see our honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge (2:11-12). We get to, as Jesus offered us, to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to return good for evil, blessings for curses, and to bear one another's burdens.