

Year A

1 Peter 2:2-10

There are some occurrences in life of which no man has any direct experience. Childbirth is an obvious one that springs to mind immediately and despite a man's assertion that he has experienced comparable pain to it, most women would be inclined to disagree. And there is no argument with that because men have no experience of it. Another life occurrence which men have no experiential knowledge of is the breast feeding of a new born child. It's

that experience which Peter alludes to at the beginning of our passage today. I am told that there is always a settling in time when a mother is learning to breastfeed her new born child. The mother has to be relaxed enough for the milk to flow and attentive enough for the baby to latch on. The mother has to take care of her own nutritional needs in order to produce enough milk for her baby. The baby has to learn too. They need to learn quickly without tiring themselves out in the process. The first week is important and both have to work at making it a success. But both know at a deep level

how to do it: they are hardwired within their DNA to sustain life. I think that's what Peter was getting at here at the beginning of chapter two. We all know that we need spiritual milk to grow. Please note that there's no hint here of the need to move on to solids. That's not a distinction that Peter is interested in and we must dismiss any awareness we have of that other Scripture, 1 Corinthians 3, here. The spiritual milk is what we need, and we all know we need it and God knows we need it too. Like the mother and the baby, God and the believer

are relating at that hardwired level, to sustain life.

Remember the overall context of the Christian's life is one of exile. We are people who are passing through; we are refugees, strangers in this land. And so for the exile to find any hope there must be a sense of pulling together with a common purpose that life might be sustained now in advance of our destiny. The strong sense of community living, of relational living, is emphasised in 1 Peter and here in chapter 2 we learn something of the shape that that might take as it is conceived of in terms of a building.

Christ is called a living stone, a cornerstone.
Christians are called living stones too and
together all are part of what is being built
unto God.

I came across the following poem recently of
unknown origin.

It is entitled: *A Builder Or a Wrecker*

“As I watched them tear a building down

A gang of men in a busy town

With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell

They swung a beam and the side wall fell

I asked the foreman, "Are these men skilled,

And the men you'd hire if you wanted to
build?"

He gave a laugh and said, "No, indeed,
Just common labor is all I need."

"I can easily wreck in a day or two,
What builders have taken years to do."

And I thought to myself, as I went my way
Which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring life by rule and square?

Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan
Patiently doing the best I can?

Or am I a wrecker who walks to town
Content with the labour of tearing down?

"O Lord let my life and my labours be
That which will build for eternity!"

The strength of that little poem is the focus on the object of building. We seek to be part of a building which will last forever just as the cornerstone is everlasting. Christians are to be built up not to be used as wreckers. It is important that we examine ourselves and are ruthless with ourselves when it comes to this. How much time do we spend tearing down when we are called to be built up? We have been called out of darkness into the light of Christ and our attitudes and actions must demonstrate that this has indeed occurred. And once we are sure of that we must ask ourselves what is being

built? Note that that is in the passive voice: we are *being* built, not we are building. It is God who feeds us with the spiritual milk and it is God who builds the spiritual house and the holy priesthood. The sacrificial nature of the imagery cannot be missed. Here is a temple being conceived and populated not by some priests and a while lot of laity but by a comprehensive holy priesthood: all of you! We all have a priestly function under our great high priest Jesus and that is to minister to one another. The passage began by referring to a spiritual feeding and that was re-enforced by the assertion that we

have tasted of the Lord's goodness. The Sacrament of Holy Communion was not far from Peter's thoughts as he expanded upon this spiritual temple being built.

With the shortage of ministers in the Church of Scotland the issue of who should be permitted to administer the sacraments has emerged in debate. There are some who believe that it should be opened to elders of the church who, after all, are ordained; set aside for holy work. 1 Peter 2 with its emphasis on a holy priesthood of all believers is sometimes offered as a supporting text. There are others who

believe that ordaining elders was a mistake from the beginning and that the celebrating of the sacrament should be reserved for ministers of Word and Sacrament. They would believe that an understanding of a royal priesthood encompassing all should be understood in a limited sense. After all why would we ordain ministers of Word and Sacrament if we are all called to the same office? These are big issues for the Church and you can be sure that they will come up at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland meeting on Saturday in Edinburgh. It is good that you know that this is a live

issue and our passage today speaks to it in some way.

Notice that the whole point of the building, the race, the priesthood and the nation is to declare the mighty acts of God. In other words all must witness to the nature of God. I have mentioned before that the Sacrament is above all a witness to God in Christ Jesus. It challenges the world through word and symbol with the truth of God's mighty acts as the people who celebrate it journey on through their exile. It is in belonging to Christ that we are given the means to witness to God and we must get on with the

task. I mentioned earlier that it is God who does the building, not us. And that is true provided that we do not assume that we are not involved in the process. It is very tempting to sit back and wait and wait and wait....

A certain congregation was about to erect a new church building. The building committee, in consecutive meetings passed the following resolutions:

1. We shall build a new church
2. The new building is to be located on the site of the old one.

3. The material in the old building is to be used in the new one.

4. We shall continue to use the old building until the new one is completed.

A recipe for inertia and nothing happened.

May God prompt us all to reflect and then to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house.

Amen.