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Alexandria, VA 22310  
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I Peter 2:2–10

## GLORIFYING GOD

In the mountains of Virginia there is a small Presbyterian church with a very unique interior design. There are posts on the end of every pew at each end. Lamp posts. But no lamps hang on them. None are mounted there. They are holders for lamps that are brought in by families. Long ago when the congregation would meet sometimes in the evening, indeed, each household would bring their lamp and hang it on the end of the pew where they were sitting. Their lanterns were a source of light to be shared by all who were gathered. And so, when families would show up, you would see their pocket of light illuminating the area around where they were seated and where others would enjoy basking in its luminescence.

There were, in this rural church, well-trimmed lamps. Even though the church had no electricity, the families were able to worship in light. But conversely, if a family didn't show up—didn't bring their lamp or lantern to church—interspersed in those pockets of light would be pockets of darkness. Powerful symbolism for how the church functions ... how we are called to live by faith in community and in commitment. Indeed, these are the prerequisites for those who would worship God. They are the essentials. There has to be a community, a place where spirits can cooperate and surrender their efforts to glorify God.

The character of our communion, or our relationship with one another, it says in Peter, is so obvious that even the youngest newborn infant, even the most vulnerable Christian can receive that character. We share community and commitment—all of us—even those who have allowed their hearts to become hardened or turned to stone. We all see the difference. The essence of what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is found in the quality of our relationship with one another. Again, the epistle describes this as a family, a household, a loyal connection, a living hope.

On Music Sunday we celebrate the path which music creates so that we might all glorify God with one voice. And the melodies of faith that we share reorient us. We glorify God with every word we speak and with every thought we have, or we entertain the verse that we didn't read this morning. "Rid yourself therefore of all malice and all guile." Insincerity. Have you ever noticed that in the middle of that word is the word "sin"? Insincerity—all slander and envy, all guile.

Music points us in a new direction. It shows us that the contrast is right there in front of us. God's call. God's claim on us simply will not tolerate malice or guile or insincerity or envy or slander. When we are proclaiming the mighty acts of God, we cannot at the same time continue to be disobedient. We have to yield to a heavenly conductor, a

leader of the heavenly host, surround the throne and forever sing to God's glory. The imagery—the imagery of stones that are either used to build up or to punish—is rich in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, indeed in all of scripture. And that is what we do in the way that we commit to one another; the way that we share communion. We are either built up by one another's association or we increase the darkness.

It is only Christ who can transform our imperfections into stones which are useful building components. It is only Christ who guarantees that even a stone can make music that is willing and needed to glorify God. God is building us a place—a dwelling—a place that is right to be filled with community and commitment. We know that music, like a house or like a church, quickly becomes subjective in the way in which it's interpretive. That's what makes the mystery of music so enticing, so wonderful, so refreshing and new each time we share it. When music glorifies God, it's because its subjectiveness has yielded to God's goodness, though rejected so often in the way in which we live every day.

There's a book entitled, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It's an old book. It talks about the descriptions of what makes us happy and why. Strangely enough, it isn't money that makes us happy. It's not even education. In know that's hard for you to hear, but it's not even whether you're young or old. Happiness—that outward expression of glorifying God—is about our willingness to exchange our loneliness for God's love, our guilt for God's grace, our despair for God's sheer delight, our terror for God's trust. And yes, our darkness for the lamp which the Lord gives us. As it turns out, the pursuit of happiness is centered and around all things glorifying God. In a choir, like character, we are in fact most focused, most challenged when we attempt to glorify God to be supportive with one another, to be equitable in the way in which we live at home and at work and in spiritual community. When all those challenges that we face every day take on a balance—adequate rest, when we are recreated into God's image, how does 1<sup>st</sup> Peter say it? “Chosen, royal, holy nation. Claimed by God. Redeemed for God's purpose.”

As we continue to celebrate God's mighty acts with music, I ask you: Where is your lamp? Did you bring it to worship today? Did you trim it and wash it and fill it with oil? Did you decide when you set out on your journey to worship today that you would share the light of Christ? If you did, you will receive that light in abundance. If you did, thanks be to God. Amen.