

The Lord be with you,

Would you pray with me as we prepare to open the Word. Lord speak to us through your living word. Allow us to once again hear the good news of Jesus and what it is that he came to do. Fill us with your Spirit and give us understanding. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Thank you for the opportunity to preach the Word this morning and to reflect about what we, as an Eastern European Team, discovered and learned from our trip this past April. Sometime before leaving on the trip, I learned that I was invited to preach at the Salt of the Earth church in Tallinn, Estonia. What did I know about Estonia or even the people I was going to address? So, I was in touch with Gary Timmerman, our long-time supported missionary to Eastern Europe, with the question, how would that work? What in the world should I be preaching about in a place and to a people I knew nothing about? Meanwhile Gary was in touch with someone we came to know and appreciate, namely Pastor Pavel Duchenko (**picture**), to ask him for some direction and for some suggestions as to what might be appropriate. It was Pastor Pavel who suggested that it would be good for his (**picture**) congregation at Salt of the Earth Church to hear something about the church and how that church ought to be living in the present-day world. That fit in perfectly with what I had already been thinking about. So, with (**picture**) Gary Timmerman translating, I preached a version of the message I am about to share with you this morning.

The question that has been rolling around in my brain for some time, and the question that Pastor Pavel thought might be an appropriate one to answer is, what is the church? And how is it supposed to function in the world? What does it mean to be “the church” in a secular society or in a polarized world or in a society which openly challenges the faith?

My thinking led me to the Scriptures, and more specifically to the First letter of Peter, chapter 2:4-12 (**on screen**):

*<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For in Scripture it says:*

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,*

*and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.” (advance slide)*

*<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

*“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”*

*<sup>8</sup> and,*

*“A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. (advance slide)*

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (advance slide)*

*<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

**This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God! (advance slide)**

The Bible has a very high view of the church and it has some very specific things to say about how that body is to present itself to the world.

The apostle Peter begins by reminding his readers that they are different from the world in which they live. Even as he opens the letter in Chapter 1:2, he calls his readers “*strangers in the world,*” scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Many of those scattered people were suffering persecution because they were followers of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, they were often charged with doing “wrong”, like many present-day Christians in the world are being charged for believing in and following Jesus. They were, as the apostle John put it, “*in the world, but not of the world.*” Peter’s readers were pilgrims,

sojourners, strangers, aliens, foreigners, not people who have their hope anchored in this world, a particular country or nationality. Rather they are a people who belong to a “*kingdom which is not of this world*” as Jesus said in his trial before Pilate.

Then Peter reminds his readers, that there is something special about them. They are unique because Christians are people who ultimately have an identity different from that of anyone else in this world. Christians are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. I may have Canadian citizenship but ultimately, I am a citizen of a much different and larger kingdom - an upside-down kingdom over whom Jesus is the ruler.

One of the ancient confessions, namely the Heidelberg Catechism, asks a very personal question of anyone reading it, “*What is your only comfort in life and in death?*” And the answer in the catechism is: “*That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.*” There is, of course, more to the answer, because the next logical question is, why do we belong to him? How does that work? Something must have happened to make those in the church belong to Jesus. Peter writes “*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.*” (v.10) So, what happened to give us this new status? Peter writes “*once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy,*” said Peter (v. 10). Again, what happened? Once we were lost, but now we are found. Once we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but now we are alive in him. How? What happened to give us this new status, this new relationship?

Jesus came! Jesus was obedient to the Father, even unto death on that cruel cross of Calvary. But on the third day the tomb was empty! He arose! He conquered death and Satan and sin. And therewith he granted us, the living stones, a new status, a new relationship. The very One who was despised and rejected by the world, has become the capstone, the Lord of all, the King of glory! He is the cornerstone of a spiritual temple which he is building with living stones, namely, folks like you and me and believers from every corner of the globe and from all tribes and races – a multitude so great that they cannot be counted, says Revelation. How wondrous is the church, the ecclesia, the called-out people of the Lord!

As a result, or in response, says the Catechism in the same answer, it makes us “*wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him*”. We are now called upon to lead holy lives, to produce fruits of righteousness, to be different

from those around us, not because we are better, but because we are different. As Christians, what we do this side of eternity matters, after all we are God's people, holy and chosen and precious and bought and marked with Jesus' blood. Peter writes, (v. 11) *"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."*

Peter is very realistic – there are challenges to leading holy lives and to producing fruits of righteousness and to being different from those around us. He talks about *"sinful desires, waging a war"* against our soul. Peter knew this all too well from his own life. He was someone who often acted before he thought. He tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die saying, *"Never, Lord...this shall never happen to you,"* (Matthew 16:22) to which Jesus replied, *"Get behind me, Satan!"* When Jesus came to the disciples after a failed fishing trip, Peter fell before Jesus' exclaiming, *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* He did not hesitate to pull out a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and cut off a soldier's ear. (Luke 5:8) Then after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied knowing Jesus, he disowned Jesus 3 times (Matthew 26:69-75). Peter knew all too well the battle against sin and the temptation to put oneself first.

But Peter also had experienced God's grace. From darkness to light! After the resurrection Jesus met him on the beach and reinstated him. *"Feed my lambs."* *"Take care of my sheep."* *"Feed my sheep."* (John 21) So Peter gets to the point in his letter where he encourages, urges those whom he is writing to, including us, to abstain, to run away from, to put away sinful desires, all those things that God hates. And what does God hate? In Proverbs 6: 16-19, we hear the word of the Lord: **(on screen)**

*There are six things the LORD hates,  
seven that are detestable to him:*

<sup>17</sup> *haughty eyes,  
a lying tongue,  
hands that shed innocent blood,*

<sup>18</sup> *a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
feet that are quick to rush into evil,*

<sup>19</sup> *a false witness who pours out lies  
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

The Lord is so clear throughout Scripture concerning what sorts of things are out of line in the Kingdom, a kingdom that is *in* the world, but not *of* the world. **(Off Screen)**

A whole sermon series could be made up about the 6 things the Lord hates, but for this morning think again of what the apostle Peter wrote in the light of Proverbs – now from The Message (**On Screen**) : *“Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.”* (I Peter 2:11,12)

So how are we doing? How is the church doing? In January of this year, Christianity Today, reported that the biblical call to maintain “a good reputation with outsiders” is becoming a bigger challenge in the US as the public perception of clergy fell to a record low. [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2024/january/pastor-trust-credibility-reputation-gallup-poll-clergy-ethi.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2024/january/pastor-trust-credibility-reputation-gallup-poll-clergy-ethi.html) Think of what we read in I Peter and then look at this chart. (**On screen**) These are the 2023 findings of a Gallup Poll taken in December of 2023 – brand new numbers! Ponder what you are seeing....

### Professions Ranked by Ethical Standards Ratings

Percentage who says members of each field have high or very high levels of honesty and ethics.

<b>Nurses</b>	78%
<b>Veterinarians</b>	65%
<b>Engineers</b>	60%
<b>Dentists</b>	59%
<b>Medical doctors</b>	56%
<b>Pharmacists</b>	55%
<b>Police officers</b>	45%
<b>Chiropractors</b>	33%
<b>Clergy</b>	32%
<b>Bankers</b>	19%
<b>Journalists</b>	19%
<b>Lawyers</b>	16%
<b>Members of Congress</b>	6%

Survey conducted in December 2023

Table: Christianity Today Source: [Gallup](#)

This has to be an incredibly sobering statistic to anyone in the church reading these findings... This is an American study – hence the “Members of Congress” or government folks at 6%. **(Off screen)** Glenn Packiam, in his 2022 book entitled *The Resilient Pastor* wrote: **(On screen)** *From small country churches to uber-megachurches, many pastors have been found to be bullies and hypocrites, alcohol abusers, and womanizers. The crisis of credibility is a symptom. The misuse of authority is the root cause. “By their fruits you will know them”, said Jesus. (Off Screen)*

In Canada, we know something about all of this too. Saskatoon’s Horizon college and Seminary in one of its publications wrote: **(On Screen)** *With publicity featuring heated divisiveness over COVID-19 regulations, sexual scandals involving prominent Christian leaders in Canada and internationally, and the church’s historic involvement with Canada’s Residential Schools, it is little wonder that opinions of the church are declining among both Christians and the general population and that “the proportion of Millennial Christians who feel the Christian Church is ‘harmful’ or ‘detrimental’ has doubled” between 2019-2021. COVID-19 accelerated an already marked decline in church attendance, particularly among Millennials, and the emergence of Generation Z introduces the first “post-Christian” generation. (Off Screen)*

There are so many more examples that could be quoted. It is no wonder that so many have walked away from the church – even from the CRC because we are not exempt from or above these sorts of indictments by any stretch of the imagination. God have mercy upon us all! We have to do better! “By their fruits you will know them,” said Jesus.

*“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires...”* Why abstain from sin? Why Peter’s warning to the church? Because Peter had seen first-hand the destructive power of sin. And he had witnessed first-hand the power of forgiveness and new life. He had come to understand that Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone in the spiritual house that God is building. All who trust in Jesus and call him Lord are called upon to live as living stones made pure and holy through his shed blood. The living stones make up the church – the called-out people of God, a very precious and loved body. And the purpose of that church, that called out people of God, is to reflect the cornerstone, or as Eugene Peterson put it, *“Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they’ll be won over to God’s side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.”* We, as

living stones, as God's precious people, are called upon to live such good lives that even if people were to charge us with being disloyal to the culture of the day or the spirit of the age, they would see our good deeds and be attracted and join us in glorifying the Lord on the day he comes again.

In preparation for our trip to Tallinn we read a book that told a wonderful story about Christian conduct right here in Tallinn and more specifically in the now famous Oleviste (St. Olaf's) Church. **(On Screen)** There is a copy of the book in the church library. We visited this church (Pictures – leave picture of us being told the story on the screen) Pastor Rein Uuemois tells the story:

*In 1950, the Soviets were solidly in control of Estonia. Oleviste Church sat empty and deteriorated from years of neglect. Broken windows. Cracked plaster. Leaking roof. No heating system. Hundreds of birds and other creatures had made it their home. It was a desolate building in desperate shape. Truth be told, though, that was fine with Soviet leaders, since their anti-God thinking left no room for the Christian religion. In fact, they decided it was time to rid their region of the Christian influence, and they had a plan to do it.*

*Rather than simply wiping out the Christians, which would have created too much anti-communist sentiment, they instead employed a tactic that had been used effectively in other parts of the Soviet Union. They would force the Christians of various backgrounds and denominations to work together. This would, in turn, cause the Christians to fight over theology. The churches, in effect, would destroy themselves. This method had been quite successful for the Communists in other places. As the Soviets simply sat back and watched, the Christians would argue over doctrines, and the churches fell apart. It was a very efficient technique.*

*With such a track record, this seemed like the best course of action to take in Tallinn. So, the Soviets brought together the leaders of several different Christian churches of varying backgrounds – and told them that their buildings were being confiscated. They could all have, together, the one ancient, vacant, dilapidated cathedral, but they would have to work cooperatively with one another. The Communists were sure this was the ticket to bringing an end to the majority of Christian influence in Tallinn.*

Put them together and they will destroy each other? What a sad commentary on Christianity and on the church, that called-out special bride of Christ! Not much of a positive reputation there...I'm afraid that this is increasingly the reputation of the church in the world. But now the rest of the story...

Pastor Uuemois wrote: *Something went wrong with their plan, though. It didn't work quite the way they had expected. Much to the consternation of the Communists, the Christians in Tallinn actually willingly worked together. They set aside their theological differences and readily collaborated with each other. At their first combined service, there were 3,000 people in attendance on that Sunday morning...* (The Great Soviet Awakening: Tom Kraeuter, Pg. 34-35)

And the story continues because from that a revival sprang up in Estonia that touched and affected the lives of thousands of people not only in Estonia, but around the world. By the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they demonstrated something of what it meant to be living stones in the spiritual house solidly standing on and reflecting the solid rock of Christ Jesus. **(Off Screen)**

I know that certainly in North America, but I suspect elsewhere as well, the church seems to have lost much of its credibility. Perhaps we have given in too much to the sinful desires that war against our soul. Perhaps we have not really understood what it means that we are spiritual stones being built into a house of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Perhaps we have not really told the story of Jesus with excitement and with love and true concern for the next generation. Perhaps we need to rediscover what it means to be the church – the called out chosen people of the Lord, dearly loved, in fact, loved so much that Jesus gave his life for us. **(On Screen)**

*“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”* Indeed, the risen Jesus Christ is coming again in all his glory and on that day, he will usher in the kingdom in all its fulness. Meanwhile, here we are. How about we go forward and sin no more... Amen?

**Pray with me.** Oh Lord, how wonderful is the church – that called out body of Christ! You gave your life for her! We praise you! But we have made a mess of things and often don't live very attractive lives. Forgive us, we pray. Cause us to truly examine ourselves and do better through the working of the Holy Spirit. May others be drawn into this blessed fellowship the glory of your name. We pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.



Listen again to what the apostle Peter wrote in verse 12 of the second chapter of his first letter written to “strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” many of whom were suffering persecution because they were followers of Jesus and therefore often charged with doing “wrong”, much like many present-day Christians in the world are being charged for believing in and following Jesus: *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”* Or as Eugene Peterson put it in The Message: *“Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.”* (I Peter 2:11,12)

Over the last few weeks, you have been hearing some principles for kingdom growth, namely principles for sharing the gospel with neighbours and family and friends. This sharing of the gospel is to be rooted in joy because of what Jesus has done for us, it starts at home, is rooted in prayer and relies on the work of the Holy Spirit. But, as Pastor Gareth said somewhere along the line, there are more Kingdom principles, and therefore allow me to add one other one by focusing in this morning on our reputation, or the reputation of the church in today's society. You see, the Kingdom principles you are hearing about involve more than merely words or sharing your identity in Christ, they also involve actions, or your reputation. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:15ff: <sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”* <sup>16</sup> *You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from*

*thornbushes or figs from thistles?* <sup>17</sup> *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.* <sup>18</sup> *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.* <sup>19</sup> *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* <sup>20</sup> *Therefore by their fruits you will know them.* In other words, you can have the most eloquent speech about the gospel, you can draw in the crowds, you can seek to let people know that the faith is important to you, but if your reputation does not match up to your words, your telling the story of the gospel is questionable.

I'd be curious to hear what you are thinking already...

Biola University alumnus David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group found, after hundreds of surveys and in-depth interviews, that two in five young non-Christians hold a bad impression of modern-day Christianity. To the vast majority of 16- to 29-year-old outsiders, Christians are defined by what we oppose rather than who we are for, he says. (Biola Magazine Staff — February 29, 2008) He wrote: *In our research, we looked for both positive and negative perceptions, and we found that the predominant perspectives that young non-Christians have toward Christianity are negative. Nine out of the top 12 perceptions were negative. The specific ones were that we're known as being hypocritical, proselytizers, anti-sinner or anti-homosexual, sheltered, boring, old-fashioned, too political and judgmental. Another aspect of the image problem is that many young Christians also share these negative images of the faith they follow.*

Dr. Peter Schuurman, adjunct professor of religion at Redeemer University in Ancaster, writes about all of this in one of his blog posts. He quotes Bradley Jersak, the Dean of Theology & Culture, a graduate studies program at St. Stephen's University in New Brunswick, who is writing about the deconstruction of the Christian faith. *"As a Canadian I was watching a lot of my American friends become so disillusioned with Trumpist evangelicalism that they were part of a mass exodus from the churches," he explained. First, they left the church, then they let go of Jesus, and finally they gave up on love. "Love doesn't work," they said and exchanged it for a retributive justice. "Which marks them as having left one ideology and picked up another without changing the spirit of it."*

There are so many more examples that could be quoted. It is no wonder that so many have walked away from the church – even from the CRC because we are not exempt from or above these sorts of indictments by any stretch of the imagination. God have mercy upon us all! We have to do better! *"By their fruits you will know them,"* said Jesus.

In Proverbs 6: 16-19, we hear the word of the Lord:

*There are six things the LORD hates,  
seven that are detestable to him:*

<sup>17</sup> *haughty eyes,*

*a lying tongue,*

*hands that shed innocent blood,*

<sup>18</sup> *a heart that devises wicked schemes,*

*feet that are quick to rush into evil,*

<sup>19</sup> *a false witness who pours out lies*

*and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

The Lord is so clear throughout Scripture concerning what sorts of things are out of line in the Kingdom, a kingdom that is *in* the world, but not *of* the world. A whole sermon series could be made up about the 6 things the Lord hates, but for this morning think again of what the apostle Peter wrote: *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

He begins by reminding his readers that they are different from the world in which they live. They are, as it were, pilgrims, strangers, aliens, foreigners, not people who just do what everyone else does. They are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. In other words, they are citizens of a kingdom, an upside-down kingdom over whom Jesus is the ruler. Things are different in his kingdom. Christians are people who have an identity different from that of anyone else in this world. We say it in question and answer one of the Heidelberg Catechism – my only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. Why do we belong to him? Because *“once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy,”* said Peter. Once we were lost, but now we are found. Once we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but now we are alive in him. How? Through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The very One who was despised and rejected by the world, has become the capstone, the Lord of all, the King of glory! And that king is gathering his children from every corner of the globe and from all tribes and races – a multitude so great that they cannot be counted, says Revelation.

Each week I spend time volunteering at St. Mary's Hospital in Kitchener. It is a joy to do so. But it was made quite clear, in our training, that in everything we do as volunteers while on duty, we reflect the values and the standards of the hospital. So, when there, I am a representative of the hospital, and could be called out on something if I were to violate the values and standards of St. Mary's. But I am not owned by the hospital, so in a way, I am a stranger or alien in that place. It is a place I go to carry out my volunteer work – in that sense I am in the hospital, but not of the hospital.

As Christians, what we do this side of eternity matters, after all we are God's people, holy and chosen and precious and bought and marked with Jesus' blood through the sacrament of baptism. As a result, we are called upon to lead holy lives, to produce fruits of righteousness, to be different from those around us, not because we are better, but because we are different.

Peter understands the challenges we face. He talks about sin waging a war against our soul. Peter knew that all too well in his own life having even gone so far as to deny ever knowing Jesus even though he had been called by Jesus to be one of the disciples and even though he had lived with Jesus for all of three years or so. Peter constantly was battling sin and the temptation to put himself first. But now he encourages, urges those whom he is writing to, including us, to abstain, to run away from, to put away sinful desires, all those things that God hates as per Proverbs 6. Why? Because Peter had seen it first-hand and because he had come to understand that Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone in the spiritual house that God is building. Those who trust in him and call him Lord are living stones in that house called upon to live as living stones made pure and holy through his shed blood. The living stones make up the church – the called-out people of God, a very precious and loved body. And the purpose of that church, that called out people of God, is to reflect the cornerstone, to live such good lives that even if people were to charge us with being disloyal to the culture of the day or the spirit of the age, they would see our good deeds and be attracted and glorify God on the day he comes again.

Kingdom growth or life is manifested through telling and doing, through understanding who Jesus is and what it is that he has come to do, namely to redeem this fallen world and make all things new.

In a book that I read recently about the movement of the Holy Spirit in Estonia, the writer tells the story of how revival took place at the Oleviste Church

in Tallinn, Estonia. In 1950, the Soviets were solidly in control of Estonia. For various reasons the Oleviste Church was an abandoned dilapidated building at that time, much to the delight of the Soviets since their anti-God thinking left no room for the Christian religion. In fact, they had a plan to make every church look like the Oleviste Church – empty and dilapidated. Rather than simply wiping out the Christians, which was too risky, they decided on another tact which had worked elsewhere in the Soviet Union. They decided to force Christians to work together, knowing from experience that the Christians would argue over doctrines and the churches would fall apart. It was considered to be a very efficient technique. So it was that in Tallinn the Soviets brought together several Christian churches of varying backgrounds and told them their buildings were being confiscated. They could all have, together, the ancient, vacant and dilapidated cathedral, but they would have to work cooperatively with one another. The communists were sure this would be the end of the church. Put them together and they will destroy each other? What a sad commentary on Christianity and on the church! Not much of a positive reputation there...

But in Tallinn something went wrong with the plan. The Christians actually worked together! They set aside their theological differences and readily collaborated with each other. At their first combined service there were 3,000 people in attendance and from that a revival sprang up in Estonia that touched and affected the lives of thousands of people not only in Estonia, but around the world. By the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they demonstrated something of what it meant to be living stones in the spiritual house solidly standing on the solid rock of Christ Jesus. (The Great Soviet Awakening: Tom Kraeuter, Pg. 34-35)

The church today seems to have lost much of its street credibility. Perhaps we have given in too much to the sinful desires that war against our soul. Perhaps we have not really understood what it means that we are spiritual stones being built into a house of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Perhaps we have not really told the story of Jesus with excitement and with love and true concern for the next generation. Perhaps we need to rediscover what it means to be the church – the called out chosen people of the Lord, dearly loved, in fact, loved so much that Jesus gave his life for us.

*“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”* Indeed, Jesus is coming again in all his

glory and on that day, he will usher in the kingdom in all its fulness. Meanwhile, here we are. How about we go forward and sin no more... Amen?