

The Episcopal Address to The Anglican Diocese of All Nations (ACNA)

Delivered at

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By

The Right Rev'd Dr Felix Orji  
D.Min, M.Div, DipCS, M.Ed, BA.Ed, DD, OSB, ECCK  
Diocesan Bishop  
The Anglican Diocese of All Nations (ADAN)  
Anglican Church in North America (ACNA)

IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST

1. In Christ there is no East or West,  
In him no South or North,  
But one great fellowship of love  
Throughout the whole wide earth
2. In him shall true hearts everywhere  
Their high communion find;  
His service is the golden chord  
Close binding all mankind
3. Join hands then, brothers of the faith,  
What e'er your race may be!  
Who serves my Father as a son  
Is surely kin to me.
4. In Christ now meet both East and West,  
In him meet South and North;  
All Christly souls are one in him,  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

## Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## WELCOME

It is my pleasure to welcome you - Clergy, Noble Knights and Ladies, Laity, and our distinguished guests to our 2025 Diocesan Synod. We also extend our warmest welcome to our plenary speaker, Rev. John Stonestreet and his wife Sarah. John will be speaking to us on the Image of God.

## GRATITUDE

This year I will not be mentioning names as I have done in the past because I may inadvertently forgot to mention some names and that does not go down well. So I want to thank ALL OF YOU all, including the San Antonio Archdeaconry, for the ministry you have done in the Diocese, for your financial giving to the Diocese, and for assisting Lilian and I during our time of bereavement. Many of you surprised us by your generosity. Thank you. The Lord knows who you are and what you have done for the wellbeing of this diocese and he will definitely reward you in due time.

Currently, we have about 80 clergy and 38 parishes in the Diocese. Many of these parishes are small. Please pray for them and encourage one another in the work of ministry.

We welcome our new clergy to the Diocese:

Rev Scotty Weeks

Rev Joey Odell

Rev Dr Emeka Onyeka

Rev Dr Robert Redman

Rev Obinna Madu

Rev Canon Dr Felipe Sediles

Venerable Chuck Collins

Venerable Isaac Olasehinde

Venerable Raphael Ebube Onyekachi

Since the past year, the Lord has helped us to initiate the following:

1. Diocesan Bible Study Outlines 2025 covering 52 weeks of the year
2. Discipleship Bible Study Manual consisting of 10 Studies (see Appendix B)

3. Catechist Training School: <https://www.catechisttrainingschool.org/>. Please note that New Registration Opens in June for Fall Semester
- 4 1662 Fellowship of North America Episodes on ADoAN YouTube Channel
5. "Together on Mission" Podcasts
6. Pre-Synod Church Planting Boot Camp:  
June 5th: 9 AM - 3 PM
7. Regional Archdeacon Training Initiative
8. Monthly Sunday School Lessons for Children
9. Order of St Benedict Fellowship
10. ADAN Theologica :A Diocesan publication dedicated to theological and practical divinity articles, aimed at fostering continuing theological education and enhancing the practice of ministry. We invite your contributions and appreciate your engagement in this important work. (We encourage to submit your Articles to Venerable Professor Godspower Ugbor. You can reach him at: (347) 819-6356 or [adantheologica@gmail.com](mailto:adantheologica@gmail.com)
11. New church plants: Our Savior Anglican Church in Sacramento, St Paul's Anglican in Seattle, The Anglican Mission in southern Indiana, and Anglican Church of Pentecost in Raleigh, NC.
12. Business Task Force and Strategic Development Committee to help us with fundraising and business ideas for the Diocese.
13. Edifying and challenging Messages from the Bishops Desk for spiritual growth, godliness, and effectiveness in ministry.
14. Clergy pastoral care.
15. Monthly clergy fellowship & professional development meetings
16. Appointment of a Chief Operating Officer
17. Weekly Diocesan Prayer meetings.
18. Diocesan Spiritual Direction & Formation Ministry

## THE FUTURE

As we continue our ministry in the Diocese here are other things we need to keep doing:

1. First, keep God's Word at the center of our personal, parish, and Diocesan life. In God's providence and by his mercies our commitment to biblical standards in preaching, teaching, pastoral care, worship, relationships, and church discipline will safeguard and secure our future. The biggest problem facing the Church aren't the liberals or politicians or gay folks. The biggest problem facing the church are clergy and laity who claim to be Christians but who have no problem disbelieving, disobeying and disregarding the Bible. When Christians act like non-believers our unity is undermined and our mission is compromised hence the secular sees us as poor or bad representatives of God in the world.
2. Second, we need to make and mature disciples as well as engage in Church planting through preaching the gospel, Worship, prayer, Bible Study and other spiritual disciplines. Focusing our mission activities and parish ministry in ways that are aligned with our Mission is crucial. Here is our Mission Statement:

“We are a fellowship of Christian believers whose mission is to make disciples of all nations by preaching the Biblical Gospel, teaching God’s Word faithfully, and supporting one another in this mission and ministry of the Church to the glory of God alone.”

3. Third, we need to be proactive in strengthening marriages and families at the parish, Archdeaconry, and diocesan levels through pastoral care, workshops/seminars, teaching sessions, and counseling.

4. Fourth, we need to ensure that Children, Youth, and Young Adults are being reached at the parish, Archdeaconry, and Diocesan levels. The youth are part of the present and future of the Diocese. What we do now with them matters a lot for the future. We need to lead them to Christ, disciple them, and prepare them for leadership through Bible teaching, Catechesis, coaching, and involvement in our parish leadership structures such as the vestry.

**Long Term Goal:**

Many clergy in ACNA today will most likely be retired in about 30 years considering the average current age. The ministry of the Church and the Diocese will be passed on to our youths, so we need to prepare them. Developing them to be mature Christians and effective christian leaders requires intentionality, conscientious effort, sacrifice and commitment from every clergy and parish. How do we do that?

**a) Appoint a Youth Pastor or Youth Ministry Leader:**

Appoint and train someone to lead the youth ministry. Youth pastors end up becoming passionate about the things of God and more often than not will eventually end up becoming clergy.

**b) Appoint Patrons and Matrons:**

Appoint patrons and matrons to guide and support the youth ministry. Having godly and mature adults to help with and nurture the youth ministry is critically essential. They ensure that programs and activities for the youth align with the Scriptures. In many cases they can create opportunities for youth fellowship and support youth ministry financially when needed.

**c) Involve Your Youth in Church Activities:**

Actively involve youth in church activities. Give them opportunities to learn, fail, succeed, and build confidence in the process. Appoint them to read Bible lessons and train them to be lay readers in-training. Consider starting a Youth Band or Drama Team or Media Team and more. The world is fighting for their attention. Let us engage them and give them a good reason to attend church and church programs regularly.

**d) Designating a new Diocesan Youth Sunday:**

I would like to designate the 3rd Sunday in July (or any Sunday that works for your parish) to be a diocesan youth Sunday. The Sunday service should be conducted by the youth, except the priestly aspects of the service. Morning Prayer would be most appropriate for this Youth Sunday. Also encourage them to engage in team building

activities and fellowship during the week. During the youth service, a youth should be encouraged to preach the word, under the guidance of the Rector (please read and correct the sermon before they preach it).

e) Youth Session During Synod:

In the future, we are looking at the possibility of adding at least a one-hour session during our annual synod programs for matters related to youth and children's ministry. We will discuss youth ministry, its development, and strategies to enhance visibility and effectiveness in the Diocese. We will consider having sessions where training for youth pastors could be done as well. Youth representatives should be encouraged to attend Synod or be delegates under sponsorship of the parishes.

5. Fifth, we need to equip, encourage, and enable Clergy and Lay leaders to do the work of ministry through theological education, professional development, character formation, accountability, coaching, and discipline. In our Anglican polity, clergy represent the Bishop in your parishes and are under the license and supervision of the Diocesan Bishop and are granted authority to exercise your ministry by the Bishop. This needs to be understood to avoid confusion. Newly ordained clergy are curates under the tutelage of a senior clergyman for at least two years. All clergy are required to attend our bi-monthly clergy fellowship meetings. I expect clergy to be godly in their character and conduct, to study and grow in their ability to preach and teach the Bible, lead worship, perform the sacraments, do pastoral care, plan programs for various ministries, communicate appropriately, and perform parish administration, supervision and follow-through.

6. Sixth, we need to be committed to gospel unity and partnership in our ministry in the Diocese. The focus should be on collaboration rather than competition and isolation. How do we do this? By praying together, preaching from the Bible together, giving financially, walking in brotherly love that eschews all forms of power-grabbing, racism and tribalism in the Diocese, and by being intentional in reaching out and caring for one another in good and difficult times.

7. Seventh, we need to pray at all times for one another. In Colossians 4:2-4 Paul writes, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison- that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

In 2017 I asked all members of our Diocese to fast and pray once a month for our Diocese, your parish, yourself, your family, your ministry, and our nations as a DIOCESAN PROGRAM. I know we pray about these things privately and in our parishes every Sunday but I wanted us to do a few things TOGETHER to foster a sense of unity, belonging, commitment, and identity across the Diocese. Individualism is not a virtue and it's definitely not a value in our Anglican tradition and as people created in the image of our Triune God hence our practice of Common Prayer as in the Book of Common Prayer. So I ask you to observe this Diocesan program around the Diocese even if you have to use

Zoom to do so. We need to pray TOGETHER. As they say: “the family that prays together stays together”. If our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles prayed and fasted, in order to be effective in ministry, it makes no sense for us to believe that we can do well in ministry without prayer and fasting. So, let us make time to seek the face of God in prayer for one another.

8. Finally, in God's providence and by God's grace, my hope and prayer for our Diocese is that God will lead us by his Word and enable us to obey his Word. He will empower us by his Spirit to preach the gospel by pointing people to Christ, disciple new believers, plant new churches, pastor our churches well, give our youth opportunities to serve and lead, do mission overseas, equip clergy, train new missional lay leaders, and strengthen the financial and operational structures of our Diocese.

### A NECESSARY REMINDER : OUR MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

We have new clergy and laity in the Diocese so I want to draw their attention to, as well as refresh the minds of our long time members of our Diocesan Mission, Vision, and Core Values. Inability to pay attention to this led to some of the problems we have had in the past. So let's refresh:

#### A. Mission Statement:

We are a fellowship of Christian believers whose mission is to make disciples of Christ by preaching the Biblical gospel of grace, teaching God's Word faithfully to believers, and SUPPORTING one another in this mission and ministry of the Church to the glory of God alone.

#### B. Vision Statement

Our vision is to plant, grow, and revitalize churches made of disciples of Jesus Christ from every nation, race, tribe, and tongue who are Christ-centered, biblically-focused, mission-minded, Spirit-filled, holy, loving, and united under God for His glory and praise.

#### C. Core Values:

1. TRINITARIAN – We are Trinitarian Christians. This means that we are focused on and committed to our Triune God, believing in Him, relying on Him, and walking in wholehearted devotion to Him. Knowing Him, delighting in Him, and enjoying Him forever. Exalting and proclaiming Him. And relying on the Holy Spirit for Christian life and ministry.

2. CHRIST CENTERED - Christians are saved and accounted righteous before God only by the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man, by faith in his death for us and not by any works or deservings of ours. We believe in grounding our lives and work in the formational historical events of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and session of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. BIBLICAL

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the inspired Word of God and our primary authority for faith and morals. We are Bible-Driven hence committed to expounding the Bible, with Biblical delight, wholeheartedly walking in the way of God's Word, preaching it to ourselves and to others. Desiring to do everything in Biblical ways and with Biblical means.

#### 4. HISTORIC ANGLICANISM

We trace our identity to the New Testament Church, the patristic era, and especially the 16th century English Reformation that valued the Apostolic faith, expressed in Holy Scripture, summarized in the Creeds, celebrated in the dominical Sacraments, and preserved by the traditional Anglican formularies (The Book of Common Prayer-1662, The 39 Articles of Religion, The 1662 Ordinal, and The Two Books of Homilies).

#### 5. MISSIONARY

We will equip Anglican Christians to live as beacons of hope and light in their workplaces, neighborhoods and families, and plant new churches, with a special focus on extending the love of God to growing ethnic populations. We are Gospel-Motivated, eager to organize our life and ministry around Jesus' mission. Proclaiming the objective biblical gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christians for their conversion, and proclaiming the objective biblical gospel of Jesus Christ to Christians for their growth. Making disciple-making disciples of Jesus. Everyone is called to be a missionary.

6. LOCAL CONGREGATIONS - The primary place where the Christian life is lived and shared is the local congregation. The local congregation must be committed to godly Historic Anglican Worship, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandment. The function of the Diocese, therefore, is to provide episcopal ministry of confirmation, discipline, enrollment into the various Unions and Orders, and ordination, give direction, support and encouragement to local congregations, discern new opportunities for churches, and to ensure that God is truly worshipped and that God's Word is faithfully preached, practiced, and taught. The Bishop of the Diocese may approve liturgical practices that serve our work of mission.

7. GENEROUS - In our commitment to strengthen our Christian witness, our Anglican identity as a Diocese, our episcopal bonds, and our presence in the world, each parishioner and each congregation is encouraged to give generously, joyfully, sacrificially, with the understanding that all we have (all of it!) is a gift from God. Each Congregation is encouraged to join in the cheerful giving of 10% to support the Diocese and its mission, and 10% to outreach and mission.

#### 8. PRAYER

We cannot do the work of God and accomplish the purpose of God without the power of God and the blessing of God. We therefore commit ourselves to be a Diocese that prays. As God's people we express our dependence on God through prayer for the Church and the nations.

9. DIVERSITY(ALL NATIONS): We believe that the Lord intends his church to be a multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual community of believers united as brothers and sisters in Christ in one body through faith as reflected in the Great Commission(Matthew 28:18-20) and demonstrated by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost(Acts 2). God wants his church to live and demonstrate this unity on earth in every way possible with love in the bond of peace. Striving for unity under God in the body of Christ is indeed one of the most important signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We value racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in our Diocese and in our missionary endeavors. The Lord must be at the center of this Diocese rather than our individual, tribal, national racial and political affiliations. Political idolatry, tribalism, racism, ethnocentrism or theological liberalism and extremism should not be tolerated in Church of God. Christ and his Word remain at the center of all we do in our diocese.

10. HOLINESS OF LIFE- In 1 Peter 1:14-17

“[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." [17] And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile”. We believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. However, as Jonathan Edwards rightly reminds us “True salvation always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert. Therefore, whenever holiness of life does not accompany a confession of conversion, it must be understood that this individual is not a Christian." Having been saved by Christ and united to him we are called, commanded, and enabled by God to live holy and godly lives in the world. A holy life is the life that is characterized by union with Christ through faith leading to godliness, daily repentance, and a determination to obey the Word of God from the heart by enabling grace of God. A holy life is characterized by the presence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit evidenced by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”(Galatians 5:22-24).

## II. Episcopal Charge : Our Identity in Christ

Let me read from 1 Peter 2:1-12:

1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-

3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 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."

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

### A. Introduction.

I have a question for you! Who are you? When you look in the mirror, who and what do you see?

In the 4th century BC(384-322) Aristotle told his students that "knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom". Aristotle probably heard that from his teacher Plato who learned it from his teacher Socrates who said "Man know thyself". Do you know yourself? Who are you/we? If you don't know yourself you're in serious trouble. Identity has been a very important issue historically speaking and has, lately, become an increasingly important topic in our contemporary world. In fact, it has become a political, religious and social hot button. A hot button is something that creates a strong emotional response or reaction. For instance, what pronouns should or must I use to refer to you? Today we have expressions such as identity politics, identity crisis, identity theft, fake identity, false identity, duplicated identity, gender dysphoria, and gender fluidity. Knowing yourself as God has actually made you and recreated you is important for your spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual, relational, and social well-being. A lack of understanding of who you are will inevitably lead to spiritual, emotional, legal, relational, physical and social

problems such as messianic, inferiority, or superiority complex, role confusion, and possibly eternal damnation. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus says

[21] “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ When you think that you ARE a Christian but Jesus Christ doesn’t know and acknowledge you as a Christian you’ve got serious identity confusion issues! But that’s exactly what is happening now and will happen at a dramatic scale on the day of judgement as Jesus warned!

It is important that we are clear about our identity because as someone rightly said “For every glorious truth about who you are in Christ, there is an insidious lie attempting to distort your identity. Silencing these lies is not easy in today’s world. The world holds out for you a whole menu of identities for you to assume, that masquerade as being real and beneficial. But your identity isn’t defined by how you look, what you do, or how well you perform—it’s something given by God, declared over you, and unshakeable.”

So who are you/we? The Bible tells us. In the first century, Peter the apostle, in his first letter to the Church to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, was anxious to remind them and us of our identity before God. In fact that was how he started the letter in chapter 1:1-2. He calls Christians “elect” and “pilgrims”, and he does that again in chapter 2:11 where he calls them “strangers and pilgrims”. In our text he once again focuses attention on our spiritual identity and the implications thereof. Let’s look at it together.

#### B. Our Identity: who are we?

1. First, we are born of God (V.2) through faith in Christ (John 1:12-13). We are told how this faith that led to our spiritual birth came about in 1 Peter 1:22-25: [22] “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you“. We have been born again through the living and abiding word of God hence we are God’s children. Dr. J. I. Packer once said that, “The highest and greatest blessing of the new covenant is adoption.”

We have been regenerated and adopted by God himself which makes us objects of his mercy and of his gracious fatherly loving affection. The apostle John was astonished and we should be astonished by the fact that God has adopted us as his children. Notice in 1 John 3:1-3, 9-10 “1 Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall

see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.... 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

In Galatians 4:4-7 Paul reminds the Galatians of their status as God’s children “4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God”. We are not slaves but Sons of God. And because we are sons of God, we are now Heirs, in fact, joint heirs with Christ HIMSELF! All these gifts come by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone! Totally not merited but freely and lavishly given to us!

As his beloved children he wants us to do two things:

a) First, he wants us to lay aside ungodliness. Look at verse 1. Get rid of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander/evil speaking etc. These are moral junk food for junk living. These vices undermine our identity and purpose and hinder the manifestation of the glory of God in and through us. They are growth inhibitors and they inhibit and sometimes destroy unity in the body of Christ.

b) Second, he wants us to grow, just like every parent does. He wants us to grow in knowledge of him, intimacy with him, in holiness, godliness, understanding of the breadth, depth, and height of divine grace, and his treasure in us. He wants us to grow and mature in our ministry and use of the gifts he has given us. How do we grow?

-We grow by desiring, in fact, craving the pure unadulterated milk of God’s Word(2 Cor. 2:17). A healthy baby or body craves milk and food. It’s an instinctive natural desire. Similarly God’s children will and should crave God’s word: there should be a ravenous hunger for it. God’s Word is necessary for our growth. According to John Stott said that “The greatest single secret of spiritual development lies in personal, humble, believing, obedient response to the Word of God. It is as God speaks to us through his Word that his warnings can bring us to conviction of sin; his promises to assurance of forgiveness, and his commands to amendment of life. We live and grow by his Word”. God’s Word is essential to our relationship with God, faithfulness in Christian worship, effectiveness in ministry, fruitfulness in mission, and good relationships within the body of Christ. In Joshua 1:8-9 we are told that prosperity, that is, the fulfilling of God’s purpose, comes by believing and obeying the Word of the LORD! In the New Testament Paul exhorts the Church to let the Word of God dwell RICHLY in us (Colossians 3:). We need to learn and submit to it rather than to our feelings, frustrations, and experiences. Sadly many evangelicals allow feelings, family, friends, political affiliation, and their culture to determine what they do. This is why we need the Word of God so that our minds are

renewed enabling us to live as children of God. As we spend time in God's Word, we are reassured that the Lord is gracious, merciful, powerful and sovereign. Once again John Stott was right when he insisted that, "A spirit-filled Church is a New Testament Church in the sense that it studies and submits to the Word of God. We must allow the Word of God to comfort us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency, and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior." As a diocese we need to soak ourselves in God's Word, as individuals and as a church. Dr. David Wells warns that "An evangelical faith that is not passionate about truth and righteousness is a faith which is a lost cause. All that it will then be living for is simply its own organization". As God's children we need the Word of God which is the truth of God in order to stay on track with the purposes of God.

According to his Word, we are his children. And as his children we will never get to a point we no longer need his. So after you've become mature and an ecclesiastical big-man, you must not forget your primary and most important identity which is that you are a child of the living God. God is our daddy!

2. Secondly, we are Living Stones(v4-5).

There is now a change in metaphor from a living(human) being to living stones, feeding to building, body to temple, and household to spiritual house. We are living stones because Jesus is the Living Stone, chosen by God and precious to God who made him the Chief cornerstone/capstone in this spiritual house and temple. He is the living stone who died but rose to life again. When we repent and turn to him in faith, we are united to him, and we are made alive in him, and become living stones, chosen, and precious in the sight of God. In Christ and through Christ, God the Father begins to build us-living stones-into a spiritual house and temple wherein God himself dwells and is worshipped. In a sense we are mobile temples of God.

a) God is building a spiritual house with us: fashioning us so that we can become this temple and offer spiritual sacrifices as a holy priesthood through Christ who is our Chief High Priest and the cornerstone of this living temple. We are the living stones, the temple, the worshippers in the temple, the holy priesthood, set apart by God to worship him and lead worship through the Christ.

b) It is also interesting that the house is both the temple and the priesthood. This means that God wants to be worshipped in us, by us, and through us. This is why it is utterly dangerous to let people worship you and exalt you. We need to respect people and honor our leaders but we must not worship them and that's what's wrong with the doctrine of the veneration of Saints, Maryolatry, monarchical view of the episcopate, and modern Pentecostal "deification" of their leaders as God's Generals and little gods.

We must ensure that it is the Triune God, who is in us, that is worshipped and not us. In Hebrews 13:15-16 we are exhorted that "through Jesus Christ, therefore let us constantly offer to God a sacrifice of praise -the fruit of our lips that confess his name."

So as living stones we must let God shape us to fit into his temple and it is our responsibility to present ourselves to God as spiritual sacrifices(Romans 12:1-2) as we declare his praises, that is, his glorious majesty and his mighty deeds in the world.

3. Thirdly, we (Jews and Gentiles Christians) are now the new Israel, or as some, who are concerned about Replacement Theory, would prefer to put it, part of his people Israel. In the New Covenant, we are now described and given the names that Israel had in the Old Covenant. Notice in 1 Peter 2:9-10, the series of descriptive epithets drawn from the Old Testament: 9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 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." Peter essentially tells us that gentile Christians, with Jewish Christians, are now a chosen generation (for salvation, worship, ministry, mission, and glorification), a royal priesthood (priests who minister to God who is king of kings), a holy nation, God's own special possession(we are precious treasure to him), who were no bodies but are now the people of God, people who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy, and called out of darkness into his marvelous light! These are about eight descriptions of our identity : chosen, royal, holy, special possession, God's people, loved, freed from darkness, and objects of divine mercy! Angels and the people of Israel are totally amazed that these descriptions also apply to Gentile Christians and that penitent rebellious sinners from every tribe and tongue are so welcomed and loved in Christ! In Christ there is no Jew or Gentile because we are ONE in Christ.

C. The Pivotal Role of Christ: The Chief Cornerstone - the Stone of Salvation and a Stone of stumbling.

The question then is how did we and how does a person receive this identity? And what is the role of Christ in all this? Our Lord Jesus Christ has a pivotal role in who we are and how we end.

1. First, we become who God has made us by aligning ourselves with Christ through faith and obedience to his Word(v. 6-9a). Notice in v. 4 "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious". We must come to Him by believing in Him. Notice verse 6-7a it reads "For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. 7 So the honor is for you who believe.." This honor of a new identity belongs to those who come to Jesus with faith.

2. Second, those who refuse to align themselves to Christ by faith will stumble and fall and be crushed as they were destined (v. 7b-8): "..but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." Those who reject Christ will be rejected and will stumble and be crushed in line with the divine purposes of God! The same fate goes for those who hypocritically align themselves to Christ in Church- the false professors of faith(Matthew 7:21ff). This is God's world and he has the right to rule it as he sees fit. We must bow to his Son. There is no neutrality in regard to Christ. It is either: He is your Stone of salvation, or, He is your

Stone of Stumbling. He can be your song and salvation or your stone of stumbling. Choose Christ and live!

#### D. Responsibilities

Having told us who we are and how we become who we are in Christ, Peter now tells us what we are to do, that is, the implication of who we are. What is our purpose and what are our responsibilities as God's children, God's temple, God's priests, God's nation, God's chosen and holy people?

1. First, we are to offer spiritual sacrifices : that is, sacrifices of ourselves as living sacrifices (body, soul, spirit, time, talents, treasures, minds etc);
2. Second, we are to declare his praises in word and action. This entails worship, praise, proclamation of his gospel, living a godly and holy life, a life of joyful thanksgiving to God for all he is and has done for us!

All this must be done in the WORLD! We must make good use of time, or as the Bible says we must "redeem the time" because the "times are evil! Satan wants us to wile away time pursuing the pleasures of this world, chasing ecclesiastical titles and power or becoming too heavenly minded that we miss our divine purpose in this world. Bishop N. T. Wright warns the church in these words: "No empire is going to bother about people who cultivate a private spirituality and an escapist eschatology." We have work to do and the work is the work of God in the world! Don't blow your opportunity. This is the time for evangelism, world missions, outreach to the Homeless, the strangers, Immigrants, the oppressed, the fearful, the drug addicts, and other vulnerable people in our communities. Don't wait to have regrets on your death bed.

#### E. Conclusion

Let me conclude. Dr. John Piper was right when he stated that "Christian selfhood is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It's defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship He creates with us, and the destiny He appoints for us. God made us who we are so we could make known who He is. Our identity is for the sake of making known His identity." It is God who defines our identity. He is the one who made us who we are, so that we may make known who he is in the world in word and deed!

Who are you? What has God made us to be? Our Plenary Speaker, the Rev John Stonestreet will have more to say to us. But according to our text, we are God's children, living stones, spiritual house, God's temple, a holy and royal priesthood, God's possession, God's chosen people, a holy nation, people who have experienced mercy, delivered from darkness and brought into God's marvelous light. I'm pretty sure that many of us do not feel this way most of the time. We need to get your feelings in line with the Word of the living God!

Your identity is not defined by how you look, how you feel, what you do, or how well you perform. Rather your identity is something given to you by God, declared over you by God and planned for you by God before the beginning of time. It is unshakeable. It is unsinkable. It is irrevocable! The calling of God is without repentance. We must hold on

to this truth because for every glorious truth about who you are in Christ, there is an insidious lie attempting to distort your identity. Satan and our contemporary culture would like to remake you and our children in their own image. We must reject and silence those lies. Silencing those lies and distortions is not easy in our world today. But we must take on that task by rejoicing in our identity in Christ, living godly in accord with our identity, teaching the Word of God faithfully, reminding one another of God's word and promise to us in Christ, and by making Christ known in the world in word and deed.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, you alone can order the unruly wills and passions of sinful men and women. Help us so to love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the many and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys may be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.