

### Once ... But Now ...

“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.” *1 Peter 2:10*

Life is full of ups and downs. We all know this reality from the youngest to the oldest. Those waves of change, those swings of extremes, are something we all experience throughout our lives. Sometimes we see it with the weather. Once it was dark and rainy, but now it’s bright and sunny. Or truer to our current climate, once spring was coming, but now winter has returned. We also acknowledge this with motivation. Once I was unmotivated to workout, but now I’m motivated to workout. Once I was motivated to learn a new skill, but now I’ve lost that motivation. These ups and downs make life feel like a yo-yo. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down.

And as much as life can feel like a yo-yo for surface level things like the weather and motivation, we can experience this even more with deeper, more personal things. Once I was sick, but now I’m healthy. Once I was connected to family and friends, but now I’m disconnected from them. Once I was uncertain about my future, but now I’m confident in where things are going. Once my life was a dream, but now it’s become a nightmare. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down. Just listening to these swings can make us feel out of sorts and yet all of us aren’t just listening, we’re also living out these swings which is far more challenging.

All these ups and downs we experience in life, make it hard to find steadiness. For every upswing we get, we often anticipate a down swing to not be too far behind. For all the down swings we face, it seems like an up swing never comes soon enough and certainly never lasts long enough. As the down swings overwhelm the up swings, it often feels like the only consistent thing is to expect our lives to be defined and even determined by those swings of regret. Once this positive thing happened, but now these negative things have taken over. We find ourselves stuck, spinning in the down swing and it’s not the kind of steadiness any of us desire.

Our Bible reading this weekend from 1 Peter 2 uses language of a significant steadiness. Peter writes, **“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.”** (*1 Peter 2:10*) This is a powerful message of steadiness and hope from Peter to the Church of his time and even now to the present day. And the impact of Peter’s message is better understood from the history he’s alluding to in this statement and the object lesson he has attached to this statement.

The historical reference that Peter alludes to in this verse, takes us back to the book of Hosea. For most of us, this is a book that’s likely unfamiliar. Yet, it’s one that we’ve encountered because it gets quoted in other parts of the Bible, like today in our 1 Peter 2 reading. Peter connects his hearers back to a time when God’s people, Israel, had a false sense of steadiness in themselves and their possessions instead of God. The security and stability they thought they had was covering up the idolatry that had put them in danger. They were further from God than they realized, and Hosea was calling them to wake up from what seemed to them a dream but was a brewing nightmare.

Hosea’s message to God’s people wasn’t only in words it was also through his life. The Lord called Hosea to live a life that matched the unsteadiness of God’s people. Hosea married a woman who was repeatedly unfaithful to him. Still, they had a family of their own and two of Hosea’s children bore names that reflected the broken relationship between God and His people. One child was given a name meaning, No Mercy, and another child, a name meaning, Not My People. While these names might sound strange, they served a powerful purpose of showing the deteriorated relationship between God and His people.

As Hosea’s family’s life demonstrated the regretful down swings about to come upon the people of Israel, the Lord also used Hosea and his family to reveal the up swing of hope He would provide. Even after her repeated unfaithfulness, the Lord called Hosea to redeem and reconcile to his wife. And to the children named, No Mercy and Not My People, the Lord promised to reverse the pain that their names highlighted. Once again, the Lord would have mercy and claim as His people, the ones who had no mercy and weren’t His people. It’s this promised steadiness from the Lord in Hosea that Peter applies to the Church of his time. **“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.”** (*1 Peter 2:10*)

You see, Peter recognized that God had kept the promise He had made through Hosea. And Peter understood how God had fulfilled this promise. It was Jesus who delivered the reality of this promise to the Church in Peter’s day. It was Jesus who brought steadiness to God’s people amid all the ups and downs of this sin-infested

life. The community and mercy Jesus made possible wasn't another temporary upswing that would eventually swing back in the other direction. No, this gift was like a stone, solid, stable, secure, steady.

Again, using other Bible passages, Peter shows that this stone wasn't any ordinary stone it was the cornerstone. This was the stone that not only served as the foundation but also set the direction for the building. In Jesus, His life, death and resurrection, that was what was laid down for the Church in Peter's time, a foundation and direction. And each individual member of this Church was also personally built upon this foundation and direction. Upon Christ the cornerstone was where Peter located the steadiness for believers. It's this truth that makes Peter's words, **"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."** (1 Peter 2:10), the consistent defining and determining statement of every believer's life.

The unsteadiness of God's people in Hosea's day – that Peter alluded to in our reading today – is a sobering wake-up call for us too. Frequently, we latch onto things that give us a false sense of security and safety in our relationship with God. We get so focused on our own actions, possessions, and situations that we ignore our idolatry that is putting us in danger. On our own and in our pride, we mistake our sinful lives as being far steadier than they really are. But the reality is that we've been building on sand and sometimes it takes a major washout for us to realize this.

And when our personal building projects come crashing down and nothing is left to help us rebuild, this is where Peter's promise in our text becomes ours too. As the Church in this present time, as current-day believers in Christ, we have been called out of darkness into His marvelous life. The ups and downs of this life and the unsteadiness they bring aren't what define and determine our lives as believers. We are built upon Christ the cornerstone. He is our light, our strength, our song. He is the solid ground through the fiercest drought and storm. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck us from His hand. For we are His and He is ours bought by the precious blood of Christ. And so, we stand firm upon His power, His death, His precious blood, His love. **"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."** (1 Peter 2:10)

No longer are we building our lives on the unsteadiness of ourselves, on our own shaky accomplishments and achievements, but we now confess by the Holy Spirit that God is building our lives firmly on Him, on His secure words and works. The stability of the lives God has given us aren't found in self-service, but in self-sacrifice recognizing that He has made us a part of something far greater than just ourselves. And as sinful and saved stones of God's building project, we're going to experience up swings and down swings this side of heaven as the Lord mercifully and graciously pieces together all the living stones of His Church. While the Lord's building project won't be completed until He returns, by His love and forgiveness He continues to guide and lead us as to how, we, His living stones, fit together best. We encourage and endure His building work among and in us trusting the steady cornerstone, Christ Jesus, on which we are being built.

Today, we have the great joy and privilege to highlight and rejoice in one specific section of the Lord's Church-building project. Today, 17 young men and women of our congregation will confirm the faith God has been building in them since their baptisms. Their confession of faith will be a powerful reminder that believers aren't built upon themselves but upon Christ alone. They are an encouragement to us of God's ongoing building work not only in them but in all of us. His work in them isn't finished even as we celebrate this major milestone in their faith journey and likewise the Lord's work in us isn't finished either.

All of us are continually being shaped to fit His building plan. By His gifts, we are being steadied in Him, knowing the patience, forgiveness, peace, hope, and love upon which He is building us so that we might continually share His steadiness with others, one stone to another. As life's up swings and down swings tempt and threaten to knock us off Christ the cornerstone, may He etch into us His steady words of hope and security, **"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."** (1 Peter 2:10) Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan