

**“Free People Free People”**  
**1 Peter 2:1-17**

God was let “loose” on that first Pentecost. It’s represented here at KesPres this morning with the doves “flying” in our sanctuary. (If you are listening to this sermon online I will make sure to include a picture). But this is not to say that God had somehow been “imprisoned” prior to the event we read about in Acts chapter 2 where the promise of the Holy Spirit comes upon the people of God after Jesus’ ascension to Heaven. It only “appears” God was set “free” while God’s people, on the other hand, (those who others considered drunk) were really the ones set free that day!

I haven’t had too much milk along with carbs and sugar over these past few months because I’m supposed to be eating “better” and drinking a barrel of “water”, daily. But there are those occasions when water just doesn’t cut it. There are times (because I grew up with a mother who kept local dairy farmers in business) that I actually “crave” milk. So I guess I understand what Peter means when he speaks about “milk” in 1 Peter 2:2. The talk of milk may sound odd in our passage this morning, because what could “malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander” possibly have to do with milk, even so-called, “spiritual” milk? But when Peter speaks mentions newborn infants, things become much clearer. You see in our culture, that is often paranoid about cleanliness, we typically think the more something is “disinfected” or in milk’s case – “pasteurized”, the purer it is. But remember we are dealing with a first century people who realize that the purity of a commodity is dependent on the vicinity to its “source”. The further away from the source, the more that has been “done to it” or the more chance of it being contaminated or the “less pure” it is. “Close to the source” means it is “free” from all impurities. So now move with me from milk to “spiritual” milk. As we have been learning for the past two weeks (or since we began our study on 1 Peter) we’ve been acknowledged the struggles of this early church community living in a world that was apathetic at best and confrontational at worst. Peter believe that with this kind of pressure people would succumb and follow the world rather than Jesus, that they would blend in rather than stick out. Or to come back to our analogy they would end up “drinking what everyone else was drinking.” So Peter, in not so many words said, “Stop drinking what the world is offering.” “It’s beyond its expiration date”. “It not only tastes bad but it can make you sick, even kill you”. “So ‘rid’ yourself of “impurities” like “malice, guile, insincerity, envy, slander” (and a little further on) “desires of the flesh, and a dishonourable life” These things are impure in God’s eyes or “unholy” according to Peter and are also results of living further away from the Source, who is God, Himself. So ridding yourself of those impurities and getting closer to the Source, you will be free. Now freedom is something is something the Hebrews new well or new not of well. Sure, for brief moments Hebrews knew freedom or a time they were not “enslaved” but for

the rest of their history they “belonged” to someone else, or so they thought. For all their life they were in fact free it’s just that they chose to live far from the Source (of life) (even God) and even further away from community. And therefore missed out on the freedom God had offered them.

In an “upper room,” some two thousand years ago, a handful of people gathered in fear. They had been together with Jesus for about three years. Three years ago they were minding their own business, that is, until God encountered them in a way they had never experienced God before and their lives (and even our lives) would never be the same again. For three years Jesus had been teaching, encouraging, mentoring, and modeling holiness for twelve simple followers and a handful of others. For three years Jesus had been “renovating” their lives. We love renovation shows around our house. Property Brothers™, Income Property™, Fixer Upper™ are staples to us. Now I know, although called “reality television,” they are “far” from real life. But we really don’t care. What we really wait for is the “reveal” or that moment when the homeowner see the transformation like when Drew and Jonathan open the door, when Scott gives the key or when Chip and Joanne pull back the giant picture of what once was to show off what is now there. Watchers only catch glimpses of the hard work it took to get there, only the highlights like when the water pipe burst or knob and tube wiring is found. But all those “troubles” are soon forgotten when the finished project is finally revealed. In a similar way Peter says you and I are being “built into a spiritual house.” Not milk but “spiritual” milk. Not a house but a “spiritual” house, which is yet another confirmation that Peter actually listened as Jesus shared all those parables with him. A house, as you and I know, is not made with one “single” brick but with many bricks. Each needed to strengthen the house and none more important than the “corner” stone. Now I’m not a bricklayer but I have been told that the corner stone is the stone in any building that is so critical that if removed would cause everything, absolutely everything, to collapse around it. It’s similar to the last brick that is placed in a rounded archway or the brick or stone found at in the very centre and top of the doorway that takes the weight of the rest of the stones around it. Remove it and everything falls. We are “free” to live in community – not free as in it costs us nothing or not free as it’s up to you to decide but free as in no longer thinking we are able to go the journey alone. We are free to go against our very nature that tells us, “You don’t need anyone” or “You are an island” to proclaiming, “we need one another” and “for God to do His best work we need to be together”. Together we are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God’s people.” Did you notice the common denominator in all those descriptors for God’s people or the church? You’re right – they are all plural, reinforcing again that we are “better together.” Even as aliens and foreigners, even living holy and different than everyone else around us we do life together, together re-writing the story of our community as “free people”.

It's no wonder then that at the end of our passage Peter finally reminds the church, reminds you and I as the church, to live as "free people". Free to no longer live in the bondage of your old way of life or your old way of thinking. Free to live in community, not as perfect people but "good people trying to do better". Free people. I heard a sermon recently about the negative impact the church can have upon the community and the world itself. One need not go back too many years, for example, to see the result the church has had upon the first nation peoples with the establishment of residential schools. Emotional, physical and in some cases sexual abuse was not the exception but the norm and all in the "name" of Christ. Or look even more recent to sex scandals with young boys at the hands of spiritual leaders and again all in the name of Christ. And view social media as recently as this morning and you will read Facebook™ posts that some "Christians" share about immigrants and refugees and all in the name of Christ. The minister went on to say, "hurt people hurt people." Often those, even those who proclaim Christ, who are hurting and living far from the Source, hurt people far from the Source. Yes, hurt people hurt people just as angry people take out their frustrations on others or judgmental people raise themselves above others, graceless people stand as God and make others follow "man-made" rules and enslaved people enslave other people.

Living as foreigners means being placed in a culture that does not think like we think or believe like we believe. It even means encountering people who are not simply ambivalent but negative towards us. In other words, meeting people who are hard to love. But you and I are free to love. We have been freed to love and welcome others into our little community of faith. "Once we are not a people but now we are God's people." There are countless people in our community who may appear to have everything they need – many who even have more than we have but all are missing "something". All are missing community, whether they know this or not. But saying this is not simply about increasing our attendance on a Sunday morning but about increasing the size of God's family. Countless people either by choice or the church's refusal to "go and make disciples" as Jesus asks, are living "out of community". Our mandate is to begin a "community of three:" you, God and another by investing in just one life, even now. It's about meeting that neighbour. It's about speaking to that person behind you in the grocery line. It's about inviting a friend to church or demonstrating God's love to a stranger. But first and foremost community is about loving those in our community, everyone in our community, and making them aware of a better community they are invited to be part. You are free to love others, even before you even know you love them.

But along with loving others you are also asked to be free to show mercy. Yes free people show mercy. "Once we had not received mercy but now we have received mercy." God has always been merciful to us but most of us did not understand mercy until we see it ourselves or see in our

own life first. So along with loving your community you need to show your community what grace looks like. It's easier, if you see the same Facebook™ posts I see, to be angry, judgmental and graceless. And sad to say this is often how the world sees the church. And you can't blame them. I'm the first to say that I know countless people who don't "deserve" grace but then again I am one of them. But free people display grace. And not just in words (It's easy to show mercy and forgiveness with a simple word) but it is quite another thing to act upon it – to really "free" people with acts of justice and grace. In other words "free people free people."

Free people free people. I love that phrase. Free people free people. Free people do not enslave others with rules and regulations. Free people do not imprison others with guilt and shame. And free people certainly don't lock them away on their own. No free people free people. Free people incarnate themselves into others lives. Free people invest in others with no other motive other than because they love people and want others to know the free gift of grace that they themselves have known. In other words free people free people. But then again isn't that what God did in an upper room, on the ceiling of our church, or what you and I do as we re-write the story of our community? Let us pray...