

I will say that the Bible study crew challenged me this week to get up here with a milk mustache painted on, but ya know...there are some things that even I can't work myself up to do. Yet, it doesn't mean that I can't give us all a little throwback to the mid-nineties when the "Got Milk?" campaign was spreading like wildfire. I will admit that at one time in my life, I combed through stacks of magazines attempting to find the "Got Milk?" ad that the Friends cast did so that I could add that to my wall of already poster plastered bedroom. But I'm guessing that that ad isn't the one we all remember. No, I'm sure the one we all remember is the one that in our current cultural timeline would have a little bit of an ironic twist to it all because of a certain Broadway musical.

I would bet a lot of us can picture the commercial. A guy is digging in to an ooey gooey peanut butter sandwich while his radio plays in the background and the radio announcer says that the trivia question for the day is, "Who shot Alexander Hamilton in their infamous duel?" The guy scrambles to the telephone, an actual telephone, not a cell phone to tell you how old this ad is now, he dials, and surprise, he is the lucky caller! Does he have the answer? He does, "Ah-run Burr." The announcer can't understand him. He runs to the fridge to pour himself a glass of milk to unglue his peanut butter laden jaw and alas, there is only one single drop of

milk left. He scrambles, he yells into the phone, desperately trying to get them to understand he *is* saying, “Aaron Burr,” but it’s to no avail. The peanut butter has defeated him. He loses the contest. He needed milk and it wasn’t there to save him. What better reason to always have your fridge well stocked with plenty of milk, the next time you have the potential to win a radio contest?

It’s ironic to me that almost 30 years ago, that question about Hamilton and Burr was difficult enough to practically be a foreign concept. If you asked that now, most people, even if they have forgotten all of their US History from high school would know it because Lin-Manuel Miranda would immediately be singing in their heads, but that’s the way things go. Times change, knowledge ebbs and flows, our cultural awareness changes depending on what’s popular, but one thing seems to remain constant, whether it’s 2023, 1995, or the late first century and that thing appears to be none other than...milk.

It’s a weird thing, I know, and yet, it’s an image so pervasive throughout time and culture that even the author of 1 Peter knows that they can use it to get their point across to the people they are writing to. They look at the world, the church in particular, around them, and they see a people who are starting to be corrupted by the slings and arrows of the

world. The Roman Empire has continued its era of domination and more and more, it's becoming easier to sidle up to empire, pay homage where it's convenient and slide through life with a foot in each world, a foot for faith and a foot for Caesar. The author sees them drinking from the cup the world offers to make life a little easier, faith a little more jaded, and so they fall back on the easiest, most knowable metaphor they can find. Childhood and our dependence upon our mothers for sustenance.

The author calls the church back to itself with a simple notion...be like babies. Be needy for the gospel. Be demanding for Jesus' presence in your life. Keep your eyes focused and narrowed upon the only thing that can truly feed you, pure, spiritual milk. It's like he sees the church being asked who brings you salvation, but their jaws are so clenched on the empire's peanut butter that they can't get out, "Jesus!" They need milk. They need to get back to basics, to who they were created to be. They need to remember who they are. They need to taste and see that the Lord is good so that they can be reminded what it is to partake in Christ and be in Christ.

But it begs the question why? Why is this the call the writer of 1 Peter is making? Because already, even in its infancy, he sees the early Jesus movement, the beginnings of the church, fraying, forgetting who they are, making too many concessions to the world around them, and it scares

him. He tells them that they need this milk, they should long for this milk for a couple of reasons. The first of which is that it will remind them of their salvation, but not just for their own sake. It's great to be like oh I'm saved, and then go about your business like it doesn't matter. It's a whole other thing to *live* like you are saved, like what Christ did for the world and for us makes a difference in our lives, and already, a few decades after Jesus' death and resurrection people are forgetting it.

The second reason for this beverage recommendation is because of *who* they have been claimed and named to be. They are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *God's own people*, and not just for the sake of saying, oh yeah look at all the fancy names on our business cards, but for the sake of the world. They need to remember who they are so that they can go out into the world and proclaim light in the darkness, mercy and hope for all of God's people. Suddenly a glass of milk doesn't seem like such a simple thing, but is in fact a reminder of a calling and an identity. Long for this milk because it will guide your life and who you are for the world. Suddenly, when taken in its full context, it becomes apparent that the understanding of milk's importance isn't the only thing that hasn't changed in a thousand years or so. It seems that since there have been people who believe in Jesus, there have been people who have struggled with what that

actually means for the lives that they lead in the world. Does it even really matter? Depends on the milk you're drinking, I guess.

If I just say to all of us, we are God's people, I'm not sure it makes any difference to us. I'm not sure it actually sinks into our hearts in a way that *means* something when we're out living in the world. It's become kind of a throwaway line, yeah, yeah, I belong to God. Awesome. But what does that *mean*? Or rather, what *should* it mean? It should mean...everything.

When the writer of 1 Peter tells his audience that they are a holy nation, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's *own* people, it is a radical, treasonous, life-altering claim. A holy nation—a people set apart, not some off-shoot of Rome, another cog in the empire machine, but a separate land and people, defined by their own rules, their own identity, not beholden to any ruler but God. A chosen race—not some designation based on skin color or ethnicity, but a statement that in God's kingdom where diversity is embraced and deemed beautiful, *all* people are chosen, *all* people are equal. A royal priesthood—not a separate and elite class that lords over others, but their whole community are meant to be servants, leaders, priests to one another, preaching the word, bringing healing and hope, they all are ministers of the gospel. God's own people—no longer separate, but one community, one people, claimed and named by God to be in this thing together. Living as

though everything that they believe matters, living for one another because they are now no longer just individuals but a beloved community.

What would happen if we actually decided to live like this? What would happen if we actually lived like we *believed* we are all of those things that we claimed: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people? What does it mean to be a holy nation in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world? What would it mean to separate ourselves from the enmeshed, clinging tendrils of empire and declared that love and grace were the things which mattered the most instead of the almighty dollar and our own individual needs? What does it mean to be a royal priesthood in the church in modern America? A people that knows that the church isn't a building, but a people, a people called to actually be God's hands and feet in the world? A people that doesn't think we know it all or are better than others, but are a beautiful extension of God's body in the world, welcoming all of God's children into the work of the kingdom. What does it mean to be a chosen race in a world that would hear that as a condoning of racial prejudice? It would mean honoring and valuing the race and identities of all of our siblings and then joining together as one knit together community that honored our differences and said diversity is one of God's greatest gifts to us. To say our chosen race is God's humanity, seen and cherished for who they are.

Ultimately, what does it mean to be God's own people in a world torn apart by war, prejudice, hatred, violence, ecological crisis, and a mentality that says I'd rather take my ball and go home than talk it through? I mean, maybe the even more pressing question is do we even *want* to be God's own people if that means living as Jesus called us to live? I mean that's how serious this calling is. Saying we are people of grace, people of the resurrection, people called to love as God loves is one thing, but living like it, living it out? I mean, are we actually, truly interested in that? It's a question for each of us to ponder just as it was a question for every person who heard 1 Peter read the first time to ponder.

Does your faith matter? Does your identity as one of God's own people matter? And if the answer is yes, then the next questions are why and how? What does it look like to live like your faith matters and makes a difference in the world? What does it look like to live in the full assurance of your identity as one of God's people? If it looks like condemnation, judgment, hatred, or fear, we need a new answer. But if it looks like radical love, overwhelming grace, and sweeping welcome, well then we're on the right track, it just becomes a question of *doing it, living it*. If the radio echoed the question, are you living like a child of God, could you answer, or would you need a big glass of milk to jar your words out first? **AMEN!!!**