

Those of you who are acquainted with newborn babies know, that when they want milk, they will scream their heads off until they get it. There is no calming a hungry, angry, needy baby – the only thing that will do the trick is milk. That's what they need – they're hungry. Sometimes parents can distinguish between different kinds of crying in babies, but there is no mistaking the hunger cry. It would shatter glass.

The passage from 1 Peter opens by telling us: 'like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grown into salvation.' Likewise, you can't give a baby bad milk, or the wrong milk. It has to be right – either from its mother or from a formula. It needs to be pure. We are told as people of faith to long for pure, spiritual milk. Babies grow because they get fed the right kind of milk, and they drink a lot of it in their first months of life. If he or she wasn't getting fed, they wouldn't grow – it's that simple.

Spiritual milk helps us to grow into salvation. Once we have tasted that the Lord is good, we need to grow. I don't know any other pure spiritual milk than reading the Scriptures, giving time to our prayer life, experiencing church life with others, and wanting to change to be more like Christ. Those are the basics of Christian growth. Unfortunately, often we are so busy that we neglect the very thing that brought us to faith and to ministry. We need to get through our 'to do' list so badly that we feel that we can put growing in faith on hold.

In John Mark Comer's book 'The ruthless elimination of hurry' he says this:

‘Not only is hurry toxic to our emotional health and spiritual lives, but it’s also symptomatic of much deeper issues of the heart. Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. It is a disordered heart.’

How do we long for the pure spiritual milk and grow into salvation, when we are too busy and hurried for the Scriptures, prayer, fellowship, or attention to our own behaviour? We are destined to grow. Like those screaming babies, we are meant to crave the pure spiritual milk of knowing Christ. Often, we keep craving, and we don’t pay enough attention to our souls. In order to grow, there has to be daily, maybe even hourly, nourishment.

But, of course, in 1 Peter, we are not doing it alone. The imagery changes from babies and milk, to building and construction. First of all, there’s the living stone – the ‘cornerstone, chosen and precious’. Jesus heads up our building project as believers, as we surrender ourselves as one living stone in the wall, and ‘let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.’ We follow the living stone, and the phrasing is interesting – ‘allow yourselves to be built into a spiritual house.’ We have to submit to the process, surrender as a brick in the wall to the ones on either side of us. We should pause and remember from this passage that we belong to one another, no matter what. We don’t get to choose when we follow Jesus, whether or not we will be a part of his constructing. We are His. We allow ourselves to be built; we surrender to the process alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ, in order to build something amazing.

Let’s remind ourselves why – what’s the purpose of the pure spiritual milk to help us to grow into salvation, and the living stones in the wall to be built into a spiritual house? V 9 ‘in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’ That’s why pure milk and living stones matter – as we grow and fit together and surrender to the process of being built, we are loudly and widely proclaiming

the majesty and holiness of the living stone. That is our purpose – this is not about us.

General Synod is not about our wants, our needs, or our personal opinions or theological concerns. We are here as living stones in the wall of the Church of Ireland – and the outcome should be exactly the same as in 1 Peter – we are here, in all that we do, to proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness to his marvellous light.

Do you remember being spiritually in the dark and living for yourself? I do. I came to faith when I was 19, and whilst I hadn't had a lot of time to place my life in darkness, I knew enough to know that I was alone. That is the most enormous change to my life since I came to faith – I do not feel alone. As you know, I am retiring soon, and I have been a bishop for almost 13 years and a Rector for 10 years before that. There have been very challenging times, difficult scenarios and people, much problem-solving, and many personal mistakes. But I was never alone. I would never swap that darkness of feeling alone, to the marvellous light of walking with Christ. As living stones, we all have a past, and our job now is to surrender to being fed and being built – so that we can proclaim Him. That's it. According to today's epistle reading, that is our one, sole, integral purpose. If we are not doing that, we have to ask ourselves are we longing for the pure spiritual milk, and are we allowing ourselves to be built into a spiritual house? Or has busyness and hurriedness become so attractive that it's eroding our soul?

Reflecting on this passage, I am left with such a deep impression that we are in this together. A wall is made of thousands of bricks. We have been called together as a General Synod for the Church of Ireland and each one of us is being built into that spiritual house – together. Nobody who longs for spiritual milk and lets themselves be built into a spiritual house is left out. Nobody is irrelevant, excluded, less than, or unnecessary. We are in this together.

So, let's act as if we believe the Scriptures about ourselves and about one another – a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

I long to be fed, to grow, to be built into a part of God's house. I long to do it with each one of you. Why? So that together as one body we can 'proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light'. That's all.