

Milk, Masonry & Missions – The Church’s Mission

1 Peter 2:1-10 (text)

23 August 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What is the task/mission that Christians have in this world?

Rather, what is the task & mission of the *Church* in this world (also the mission of the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata in this world)?

Why do I ask this question?

Well, because many Christians and churches seem to think that the main mission of the Church is to get more numbers – as if church growth only means a steady increase in church numbers!

Now, of course, it would be lovely if the church (also our church) could have more members. After all, did our Lord Jesus not say, “*Go and make disciples...*”?¹

So, yes, more numbers would be lovely! However, not fake numbers – numbers at the cost of sound theology!

So, what is the church’s mission – also *our* church’s mission?

Yes, what is the church’s task/calling in this world – also our church’s task/calling in this world?

You see, many a church has drawn up a statement – a mission statement – to remind themselves every time they look at it what their task/calling is in this world.

So, where can one find a Bible passage that gives a good summary of what the church’s mission is?

Well, in our text!

You see, our text mentions the three main tasks of the church – three main ingredients that should not be absent from a church’s mission statement.

And we can sum these three up by the following three words – the three points of our sermon...

- Milk
- Masonry
- Missions

¹ Cf. Mt 28:18 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*

Milk (2:1-3)

My brother & sister (Dear young people), did you see the word “Therefore” at the beginning of v.1...?

What does this refer to?

Well to the verses directly before our text – verses in which Peter reminded his readers that *they had been born again*.²

See? See how Peter’s first readers were born again by the Word and Spirit, so that they who once were not people of God and who once had not received mercy (as verse 10 says) came to believe in Jesus Christ?

And what have they now come to experience? Well, God’s grace, love and kindness!

See why also v.3 says that they “*have tasted the kindness of the Lord*”? In saying this, Peter is quoting from Ps 34:8 which exhorted God’s Old-Testament people to, “*taste and see that the Lord is good...*”³

Now, surely, if God’s *Old-Testament* people were able to taste Yahweh’s goodness, then so much more His *New-Testament* people who have seen how the Lord’s goodness & kindness blossomed on the cross of Golgotha!

And so, Peter’s first readers’ hearts have been moved! They believe in Jesus Christ! They love Him for they have been blown away by His mind-bending kindness – that He, the Son of God, loved them so much that He willingly laid down His life for them!

Indeed, Peter’s readers have “tasted” the Lord’s kindness!

So, here is Peter’s point: Now that you have tasted the kindness of the Lord, what will your attitude be?

Well, *this* will be your attitude: Like new-born babies who don’t care much about what is going on around them, but are interested in just one thing – milk, milk, pure and undiluted milk, so is it also with those who have been spiritually born again, i.e. they have an enormous craving for their pure/unadulterated⁴ *spiritual* food – that is the Word of God!

My brother & sister, I once *saw* such a clear hunger for God’s Word. You see, there was a young woman who had lived a wild life! For fifteen years she did not want to see the inside of a church! She had cut off all her ties with church friends – even with her parents! Everyone in the church had “written her off!” Even her father doubted and told me, “Pieter, perhaps our daughter never was one of God’s elect!”

Then, after fifteen years, the Lord powerfully grabbed her! With tears of joy she came back to the church – too joyful to be embarrassed by the presence of those she had shocked and hurt so much and for so long! But here is the classic sign that she was truly born from above – *her enormous craving for the Word of God!* She just couldn’t get enough! She picked up every opportunity she possibly could just to be under the sound teaching of God’s Word!

See? Where there has been a genuine rebirth – where the Holy Spirit has mightily moved someone’s heart so that that person has been changed from living a life of sin to real repentance and living in awe of God, there *will* be an enormous hunger/craving for the Word of God – for pure & unadulterated Bible teaching!

² Cf. 1 Pt 1:23 “...*for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God*” (NASB).

³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ps 34:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ Greek, *adolos* (ἄδολος) “without deceit’ ... pass. *unadulterated* of milk 1 Pt 2:2...” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 21). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

And, if you & I are in Christ, this longing for the pure, nutritious, spiritual milk of God's Word will stay with us! We will enjoy personal & private Bible study! We will love coming to church!

A hunger for God's Word – the sure sign that someone has been born from above; has tasted (and been blown away by) the kindness of the Lord!

But look! There's something else which the born-again person will do simultaneously with devouring God's Word – i.e. putting aside all vices that violate my love for God and for my brothers & sisters!

Why will I put these aside?

Well, because, as born-again child of God, I have tasted *His* love for me in Christ! So, how can I now keep on beaming out love-*destroying* vices?

So, here are the vices that the Christian (the Church – also our Reformed Church of Wainuiomata) will put aside...

- **malice**, i.e. the desire to harm other people – often in subtle ways.⁵
- **deceit**, i.e. I will put aside any deliberate attempt to mislead others by telling half-truths.

Why will I put aside deceit?

Well, because, as born-again person, I want to be like my Lord Jesus about whom God's Word says that there was no deceit in His mouth (1 Pt 2:22).⁶

- **hypocrisy**: Yes, I will also endeavour to put aside the kind of deceit in which I pretend to act by good motives when, in fact, I'm acting for selfish reasons.
- **envy**: i.e. I will not long for what other people have – not for their talents, neither for their possessions.
- **slander**: i.e. I will do away with my sinful desire to talk other people down (to "run them down").

Why?

Well, because (as Peter says) slandering is the way in which Christians are treated by unbelievers (1 Pt 3:16).⁷

My brother & sister, so this is what the Christian, yes, the Church (also we as Reformed Church Wainuiomata) will do once he/she has tasted the Lord's enormous kindness: we will crave for the nutritious, sound, and unadulterated Word of God while, at the same time, putting aside all love-destroying vices!

⁵ In Greek, *kakia* (κακία) "...a feeling of hostility and strong dislike, with a possible implication of desiring to do harm—'hateful feeling.' σύν πάση κακία 'together with every hateful feeling' Eph 4:31" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 763). New York: United Bible Societies).

Also cf. "*Malice* is the desire to harm other people, which often hides behind apparently good actions (2:16). It reappears in similar contexts in Colossians 3:8 and James 1:21" (Marshall, I. H. (1991). [1 Peter](#) (1 Pe 2:1–9). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

⁶ 1 Pt 2:21-22, ***For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH*** (NASB).

Also cf. Is 53:9 ***And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth*** (Emphasis mine).

And also 2 Cor 5:21 ***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

⁷ 1 Pt 3:16, "***...and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame***" (NASB).

Why will we do this?

Well, as v. 2 says, "...so that by this 'milk' you & I (our congregation) may grow in respect to salvation – that, on the road towards the fulfilment of our salvation, you & I will grow in sanctification!

Well, so far regarding "milk," the Word of God – our nutritious spiritual food!

And, indeed, this "milk" is the first vital ingredient that must be in the church's mission statement!

After all, if the church – also our church – wants to grow in number, then it is vital that, through "slurping up" our spiritual milk, we get (and keep to) a sound theology!

Too many churches have tried to bring in large numbers of people by making the Gospel cheap – more palatable for sceptics.

Remember? This is e.g. what liberal preachers have tried – preachers who have preached that Christ is not the only way to the Father!

Such preachers (churches) thought that, by this teaching (and many other false teachings by which they have rejected the fact that Christ really performed miracles), they would please the natural scientists & sceptics (and so, get more numbers into the church)! And what was the end-result of their efforts? Well, that the opposite happened – i.e. that their churches got emptier and emptier!

So, what is the first task of every Christian – of every church, also of our congregation?

What is the first ingredient to come in every church's mission statement?

Milk! Unadulterated milk! Yes, an ongoing hunger for (and study of) the unadulterated Word of God!

That's point 1!

Here is point 2...

Masonry (2:4-7a, 7c; 9a & 10)

My brother & sister, in many evangelical & charismatic circles, the emphasis is on *me* and *my* relationship with Christ!

Many of their prayers and songs make this clear as, instead of talking about *us* and *our*, they put the emphasis on *me* and *my* and *mine*.

Well, is there a danger that such churches could neglect the corporate side of worship? After all, the church is more than a group of mere loose-standing individuals!

In this regard, I even once heard how one brother in our Reformed Churches said that he could happily be a Christian on his own – without going to church!

Well, of course, it is important that every person who calls him/herself a Christian will have a *personal* relationship with God through Christ – that is indeed important!

However, look what v.5 says about Christians!

You see, Peter, writing to Christian churches in several provinces,⁸ says that they are being built up as a house/temple – not literally, but in a *spiritual* sense!

And the verb is *passive* – Christians *are being built up* in this spiritual temple. That means, *God* is doing that with them!

It's like the masons who carefully select the stones they want to use in constructing a building! Michelangelo used to do the same thing. He would go to the quarries at Carrara and Pietrasanta, Italy, to choose just the best blocks of marble for his statues.⁹

⁸ The churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (cf. 1 Pt 1:1).

⁹ "Extremely hands-on by nature, Michelangelo became involved—quite literally—at the ground level as he planned his sculptures. He spent long stretches of time on-site at the marble quarries in Carrara and Pietrasanta, where he not only selected marbles and gave precise orders regarding the sizes and shapes of the blocks being quarried, but even concerned himself with the building of roads to transport the stone. He

Well, in some sense, just as masons selected their stones and then put them together to form a magnificent building, so did God sovereignly choose whom He would save in Christ. However, the big difference between God and the mason is that God did not choose/elect people because of their good qualities, but purely for His own gracious reasons!

And then?

Well, then in time, God unites His loved ones as tightly together as the mason does with his stones!

See the masonry? See the unity – a unity which Christ Himself also prayed for (in Jn 17:20-21), “...***I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ...***”¹⁰

Question: When does a person become part of this spiritual temple of God?

Well, when he/she, as v.4 says, comes to Christ the living stone which has been rejected by many people, yet who is the choice and precious stone in God’s sight!¹¹ Yes, when we truly receive Jesus Christ with all our heart!

And we should not miss *this* part – i.e. that our Lord Jesus is like the *chief cornerstone* by which all other stones in this spiritual temple are aligned and closely held together!

My brother & sister, in Old-Testament times, God’s presence was seen and felt in the temple – not that He was *restricted* to the temple.

But, in the New-Testament era – the era in which we live – where is God’s presence seen in a moving way? Well, there where Christians (also the Reformed Church of Wainui) meet together in unity! Yes, Peter did not specify whether he meant that each congregation is a temple, or that all congregations together form a temple. The point is rather that, *when Christians meet together, they make up a spiritual temple* where God is present (and by onlookers seen to be present)!¹²

But surprise!!!

Christians together are not only a *temple*; no, they’re also the *priests* who bring sacrifices in that temple!

Look at v. 5! It says, “...***you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices....***”¹³

Question:

Will Christians, being “priests,” now bring sacrifices *to atone for their sins*?

maintained contracts with numerous marble excavators (*cavatori*) and quarry cutters (*scarpellini*); as well as with carvers (also called *scarpellini*), hewers, and squarers of blocks (*squadrotori*)”

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2017/michelangelo-carrara-marble-quarries>).

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 17:20–21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Cf. 1 Pt 2:4-5, “***And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house...*** (NASB).

¹² “Peter develops them to make the point that Christians are themselves the temple of God. He does not delve into tricky questions: whether each congregation is a temple or all the congregations collectively and where God’s presence is when the members of the congregation are not gathered together. To ask questions of this kind pushes the metaphor too far. The point is rather that, when Christians meet together, they constitute a temple. They have no need of a physical temple at Jerusalem or anywhere else” (Marshall, I. H. (1991). [1 Peter](#) (1 Pe 2:1–9). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

¹³ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Pe 2:5). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

No! Our *Lord Jesus* was the complete sacrifice for our sins!
So, what sacrifices will Christians, as a holy priesthood, now bring!?
Well, sacrifices of *thanksgiving*!
Do we bring these while we are here *in this worship service*?
In part, yes! Because, with our lips, we bring to God our thankful praises in song and in prayer!
But where are Christians really that holy (and royal)¹⁴ priesthood? My brother & sister, there where we offer ourselves as living sacrifices (as Rm 12:1 says)!
What does that mean?
Well, that we are a holy/royal priesthood when, moved by Christ's love for us, we serve God's family with our special gifts with which God has gifted us individually and differently!
As Rm 12 says,

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. ¹⁵

My brother & sister, I'm so glad to say that I have often seen & experienced this self-sacrificial priestly offering among our members – and often done humbly and in the quiet!

Well, we've had point 1 and point 2! Yes, we've seen how the milk – the unadulterated *milk* of the Gospel (indeed, good theology) – is vital for the Church; also for our congregation!

And we have seen *masonry* – magnificent *masonry* – by which *the church* (also *our church*) is beautifully built together in unity, and loving one another.

So, here's now a question: Now that the church has been (and is being) fed by solid theology (i.e. the *milk* part), and now that the church is in beautiful unity (i.e. the *masonry* part), what will happen now?

Well, this brings us to the last point...

Missions (2:7b-8, 9b)

You see, my brother & sister, if the church is faithful in craving for God's unadulterated Word – like a baby is craving for undiluted milk – and if the church is united in love, then something contagious will happen! Yes, onlookers will see this and say, "Wow! How is it that you are so at peace and in so much unity and love?" And, again, I'm glad to say that some regular visitors have seen this and said, "Pieter, if I get the chance to introduce my friend to a church, I will bring him/her to this Wainui church family, for you live what you teach!"

¹⁴ Cf. v.9 "*But you are a chosen race, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's own possession...*" (NASB).

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 12:6–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

See? See why good “milk” and “masonry” are so vital to the church’s mission in this world!

Look, that’s why v.9 says, “***But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s own possession, so that...***” what?

Well, “...***so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.***”¹⁶

See? See the mission task which our Lord also commanded in Mt 28? “***Go and make disciples of all nations...***”

You & I, having been born from above, and always craving the unadulterated milk of God’s word, and being built together in magnificent masonry of unity – we have now become missionaries, yes, evangelists, proclaiming the excellencies of God Triune!

But here is something important! You see, may we always remember that, ultimately, the success of our missions/outreach does not lie in us!

Granted, God does use us in proclaiming His excellencies – and we must be skilled, for who wants to be a blunt instrument in God’s hands!?

However, here’s the reality: Some people just will not receive Christ as their Saviour!

Yes, just as many people (even His own people) in the days of our Lord Jesus, like blind masons, rejected this precious cornerstone,¹⁷ so will some also in our day reject Him. As v. 8 says, they will stumble over this precious cornerstone because *they are disobedient to the word!* What’s more, *to this doom they were also appointed!*

So, how will the church – how will our church (yes, how will you & I) – go about our missions/outreach?

You see, here’s a sad thing: many Christian groups have focused on heavily training of their members in evangelism *methods* and *techniques*. However, they neglected training them in the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, so that some have done evangelism with very little knowledge of God’s Word.

However, the best preparation for missionary work is/remains drinking that unadulterated milk – yes, becoming mature Christians who have a good grasp of Bible doctrines!

As someone has said, “I am firmly convinced that mature Christians do not need ‘methods or techniques’ any more than experienced carpenters need directions on how to operate a saw or a drill. Experienced evangelists trust in God, discern through the Spirit the person they are evangelizing, and know (like Jesus) how to adapt the message to the person and situation.”¹⁸

My brother & sister, seeing that in our own strength and even with our best evangelism techniques & knowledge, you and I can in/of ourselves not cause any person to be born from above, what shall we do?

Pray!

¹⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Pe 2:9). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Cf. Mt 21:42 *Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?...”* (Cf. Ps 118:22; also Is 28:16).

¹⁸ McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 102–123). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

After all, seeing that *drawing people to Christ* is God's work,¹⁹ you & I will do well to be in tune with God! Pray that God will use our *milk*, *masonry* and techniques to work new birth in those to whom we witness!

The church's task – also our congregation's task and mission – is all about...

- *milk* (sound & solid theology) by which we are trained in God's word!
- it's about *masonry* – i.e. not just about the individual Christian (or else we could as well do what we did in lockdown, i.e. stay at home and listen to sermons online)! But it's about the unity of Christians, a unity expressed and seen when we meet together in person – a unity anchored in Jesus Christ our cornerstone!

Where these two (milk & masonry) are good and healthy, then missions will follow!

AMEN (3,043 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁹ Cf. Jn 6:44, "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day***" (Emphasis mine).