

Sermon for February 9, 2014 – Epiphany 5

1 Peter 2:9-12 (NKJV)

Theme: You're Special

- 1) *Christ called you in mercy ...*
- 2) *... to glorify him through your behavior.*

⁹ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1Pe 2:9-12 NKJ)*

“And why should I?” I remember asking that question as a child and, to my shame, I still find myself asking it as an adult. “Why should I apologize to the person I snapped back at? She is the one that started it.” “Why should I help so and so over there? He would never think of helping me.” “Why should I stop gossiping? Why should I come to Church every Sunday? Why should I read my Bible? Why should I watch the way I act and talk?” The “why should I” list could go on and on, but there is really one simple answer to all these questions, and that answer is this:

“Because you’re special.” With St. Peter as our guide, let us remember that *Christ called us in mercy, to glorify Him with through our behavior.*

Part One: Christ called you in mercy.

The apostle Peter originally addressed this letter to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, which is now modern day Turkey, who were being tempted to give up their faith in the LORD. Why? Because people falsely accused them of all sorts of crime and bad behavior - persecuting them for their faith in Christ.

For example, the early Christians used to celebrate communion with a potluck. They called it “the Supper of Love” – remembering Jesus’ love that expressed itself in being sacrificed for our sins and responding to that love by caring for each other. The early Christians understood that Holy Communion was a special expression of unity, so they would excuse all visitors before they celebrated it – so that they would not be forced to make a confession they were not ready to make by partaking of this special meal. Well, do you know what happened? Enemies of the Gospel started spreading rumors that these “love feasts” were nothing but incestuous, cannibalistic orgies, where they would kill somebody in order to eat their body and drink their blood. They claimed that Christians would excuse all visitors from seeing this meal in order to cover up what was really going on! Many people were willing to believe these lies and persecute the Christians because of it.

When these new Christians started to get pushed around, some had the urge to push back. And why shouldn’t they, since they were being falsely accused? Other Christians were tempted to take a different approach. If people thought Christians were strange because they didn’t get drunk or indulge in a little “adult fun” – if you know what I mean - maybe it was time to let loose a little; to show their neighbors that

Christians aren't really so stuffy. Since Christians are saved by grace anyway – God would forgive their sin. So why shouldn't they?

I want to take a moment to talk about our present day situation. We also feel the pressure of the world maligning our beliefs and faith. It charges us with being unloving and bigoted for calling homosexuality a sin. The world claims that we are the cause of all its wrongs – that our religion is the cause of all war and bloodshed. People make fun of us, laugh at us and, in some place in the world, physically persecute and kill us. And so we too are tempted to think, “Why shouldn't we fight back? If Islam is willing to kill for their faith, can't we kill to defend ours? Why shouldn't we express our outrage? Why shouldn't we be angry and snap back if people make fun of us?” Or we might be tempted to think: “Maybe if we just live a little, and didn't take this “religion thing” too seriously, people will see that we're cool. We're saved by grace anyway, so why shouldn't we join in with the world for a little fun?”

The apostle Peter tells us why. ⁹ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;* ¹⁰ *who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Just as the LORD chose ancient Israel to be His dearly loved people, so also has He chosen you. You were once like a broken, vicious, unlovable dog in a pound about to be put down. But the Lord pitied you, so much so that He purchased you through his own Son's sacrifice on the cross. He washed you clean in the waters of baptism, and nourishes you through Word and Sacrament. He cares for you so much that you did not merely become his pet, you became his child. He chose all of us, to be His new Israel in the world – a holy nation unlike any other. He chose us to be His kingdom; to rule in our hearts with the Gospel

You are special before the LORD. How special? So special that He declared you to be His royal priests. And what do priests do? They proclaim God's Word to the world through their speech and their lives. They warn people when they sin. They pray for the world's forgiveness and conversion. They listen to people's problems and pray for help. They offer forgiveness to the repentant, consolation to the hurting and guidance from God's Word to all.

This is the blessed office each one of you holds: you are God's royal priests, his ambassadors to Kewaunee and the rest of the world. *“For,”* the LORD says, *“you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deu 14:2 NKJV) ²¹ This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise. (Isa 43:21 NKJV)*

So, why shouldn't you let loose and join the world in a little sinning? Why shouldn't you lash out in anger when someone bothers you? Why should you watch the way you act and talk, come to worship every Sunday, read your Bible at home and study it with fellow believers in Bible class? Because you are God's special people, holy and dearly loved children of the LORD who have been forgiven all sin – that's why! You have been saved by grace through faith, not so that you could return to your sin like a dog returns to eat its own vomit, but so that you might declare to the world the praises of him who saved you through your words and actions.

Part Two: To glorify him through your behavior.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are not of this world any more than Christ is of this world. Yes, I know we did not come from heaven as Christ did, but ever since the LORD saved you and worked faith in your

hearts, you belong to heaven. Christ's kingdom is your country, and your country is at war. Who is its enemy? The devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. Yes, you heard right: your own sinful flesh wages war against you. Your desires tempt you to sin. Your mind tempts you to question and doubt. Your feelings tempt you to despair. Whether you like it or not, you are at war; and the man or woman in the mirror is your enemy!

And don't be fooled into thinking that this is a harmless war: that if you sin it's no big deal because you can always repent and be forgiven. Is Jesus loving and willing to forgive? Absolutely! However, your spiritual enemies are out to kill you. They will not rest until they have enticed you away from Christ completely, and brought your soul into hell. And every sin they entice you to commit serves their long-term purpose for your destruction, and the destruction of Christ's Church on earth.

This is why we need to be praying constantly and always meditating on God's Word. Why? Because the LORD promises to guide and protect us through the Gospel. He will help you against your spiritual enemies so that *having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Make no mistake, the world is watching you. It wants to see you stumble. It wants to see you fall. It has no greater joy than calling Christians "hypocrites". The world loves it when you lash out in anger, when you say unloving things, when you gossip about your neighbor and refuse to help the person who asks for it. The world loves it when you accept their version of morality: living together with someone outside of wedlock, when you have sex before marriage or at least join in singing with the world the countless songs about it. "I knew it," the world said, "their religion is a sham. They are just like everyone else – trying to get ahead and do what they want."

But when we honor God with our behavior - when we show love like our Savior did when he walked this earth; when we try to avoid sin and, when we fall, confess it instead of covering it up; when we live in all humility and meekness, consider others better than ourselves, share the Gospel at every opportunity, and build others up instead of tearing them down; when we remember who we are and live our lives at the foot of the cross – then God is glorified through our behavior. The world will rage, it will accuse, it will say all sorts of untrue and nasty things about us, but that won't matter. Behavior betrays what's in the heart; and if our behavior is meek and loving, humble and forgiving, then the world will know our heart is too – all thanks to the Gospel. People will see the truth. They will know that our faith is genuine and be attracted to it.

There is a story about a slave girl named Blandina who, during the early Christian persecutions, was so meek, forgiving and loving that, after torturing and killing her, some of her persecutors were so ashamed, that they repented and became Christian themselves. This is what the LORD wants to happen, when He encourages you to have *your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: why shouldn't you follow your passions and feelings, let loose and have a little "sinful" fun? Because you are God's special people. Christ has called you in mercy, to glorify him through your behavior. Let us do this – not in order to earn heaven, but rather because we already possess it through faith in Christ Jesus, and want others to possess it as well. Amen.