

A Peculiar People

3rd in a series on Peter's Principles

1 Peter 2: 9-10

05-03-2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Introduction

Who are you? What defines your personal **identify**? How do you introduce yourself to a stranger? We all like to think that we are special. So we emphasize some trait, ability, or association that sets us apart from the rest. As a message on one t-shirt put it: *Remember you're unique—just like everyone else!*

In *Blue Collar Comedy Tour*, Jeff Foxworthy observed: “If you give me fifteen minutes alone with a redneck man’s t-shirt drawer, then I can tell you who the guy roots for in NASCAR, what his favorite sports team is, what beverage he drinks, his philosophy on life, and where he went on vacation the past twenty years!”

I. Self-Identity

Most introductions begin with the **name** that has identified us since birth. We may love our nickname or loathe our middle name, but we had no say in the matter. Like Johnny Cash’s famous song, *A Boy Named Sue*, the name given by our parents will shape the rest of our lives.

Family relations also shape us. For better or worse, we are our parent’s children, siblings’ sibling, children’s parents, and spouse’s spouse. You can pick your friends, but you’re stuck with your family.

Many people define themselves by the **school** they attended. College logos are displayed on hats, clothing, bumper stickers, and flags. The exploits of the sports teams are treated like matters of life and death.

After our names, the second thing we normally tell people is what we do for a living—which in my case is always a real conversation-stopper! Our **job** defines us. We invest the majority of our waking time, effort, and energy into work.

There’s much more. Identify is based upon nationality, region, ethnicity, sports, hobbies, favorite NASCAR driver, pets, politics, civic organizations, church, television, Face Book, Twitter, and the list goes on.

Erik Erikson was a noted psychologist and psychoanalyst of the last century. In his theory of human personality, he proposed that everyone goes through “life stages” which pose critical questions. During adolescence, teenagers wrestle with the question, “Who am I?” However, the question of identify must be constantly readdressed throughout life. Who are we? What gives us worth, value, purpose, and meaning in life?

The answers to these questions sometimes leave us filling unsatisfied and unfulfilled. J. W. Marriott, Chair of *Marriott International*, told the story about a man who went to a fortuneteller. She prophesied, “You will be lonely, poor, confused and unhappy until you are 50 years old.” The man asked, “Then what will happen?” She said, “THEN . . . you will get used to it!”

II. Divine Identity

So who are you? Today's **Scripture lesson** gives a divine perspective upon our identity. Peter tells us that God has formed a new people in Jesus Christ. The church includes a wide diversity of persons who share one common bond: they are brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of the Almighty God. In 1 Peter 2: 10, Peter declares: "*Once you were not a people, but now you are **the people of God.***"

We live in the year 2009 A. D. or Anno Domini—*the year of our Lord*. B. C. is Ante Christum—*before Christ*. Each day the calendar testifies that the history of the world was divided by the advent of Jesus Christ into the world.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, the same sort of divide occurs in our personal lives. There is the past person I was before Christ and the present person I am in Christ. Christians are "*born again*" into the new reality of God's kingdom.

But here's the catch. Christianity is not an individualistic but a corporate religion. If God is MY heavenly Father and God is YOUR heavenly Father, then that makes us . . . brothers and sisters! God's children are adopted into a large family. Remember what I said earlier: You can pick your friends, but you're stuck with your family!

People tend to view the **church** in one of two ways: it is EITHER a voluntary association of believers OR the people of God. The distinction is crucial. If the church is a voluntary association that we choose to join, then we can decide our level of participation. In reality, however, the church is God's supernatural creation. By definition, each Christian is also a part of Christ's body.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the author describes the church: "*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*"

<h3>A. A Chosen People</h3>

We are "*a chosen people.*" God has chosen you and me. We are God's children, and we have the awesome privilege of calling the Lord God Almighty "Father."

During high school, I knew two brothers who were the same age but born three months apart. Their birthdates were a constant source of confusion. Either their mother was in labor a LONG time OR she managed to conceive and deliver a child in 13 weeks! In reality, they were both **adopted** by their parents. I recall a framed cross stitch by their mother that said, "I did not carry you in my womb but in my heart." When the boys asked about their adoption, their parents assured them with the words, "You ARE special because we chose you."

An infant has nothing to do with the process of adoption. The action is initiated and completed by the adoptive parents. In the same way, God adopts us as his children. Whenever we celebrate the *Sacrament of Infant Baptism*, we recognize this vital truth. God's grace is extended to us before we even acknowledge it.

<h3>B. A Royal Priesthood</h3>

The second title given to the church is “*a royal priesthood.*” In the Old Testament, Aaron’s descendants, the Levites, served as God’s priests in the Temple. Once a year the high priest would enter into the *Holy of Holies* in the Jerusalem Temple where God was thought to dwell. There he would offer up a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the nation’s sins.

Jesus Christ came into the world as our **High Priest**. Hebrews 4: 14-16 reminds us: “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.*”

The Protestant Reformation emphasized the doctrine of *the priesthood of all believers*. Each of us has direct access to God. We are royal priests who come to God in the name of Jesus Christ.

C. A Holy Nation

The church is also “*a holy nation.*” Actually, I prefer the *Revised Standard Version*’s translation of this verse which also gave me the title for the sermon. We are a “*peculiar people.*”

When people ask me how many members we have at Sam Jones, I will sometimes reply, “We have 1,400 and some odd members—some odder than others!” We ARE a different people—some of us more different than others! In fact, we are down right peculiar.

“**Peculiar**” has a certain connotation in the South. Depending upon the context, it can mean odd, strange, off, unique, unique, unusual, abnormal, or weird. What a great adjective for the church! We ARE called to be peculiar. Last week we saw that one meaning for the word “holy” is set apart. We are called to be light in a world that prefers darkness, salt in a world on a salt-free diet. We are called to proclaim the Word of Truth to a culture that prefers lies and convenient half-truths. We ARE a peculiar people.

D. A People Belonging to God

Peter goes on to say that we are “*a people belonging to God.*” God has bought us with a price, and we belong to our God. Our worth is beyond all value. We are priceless because we belong to God.

I read an article about an **auction** conducted by Christy’s of New York in 1997. A number of dresses and other items owned by Princess Diana were auctioned for charity. Total receipts exceeded \$5 million. The highest single item was a blue, satin dress she wore to the White House where she danced with John Travolta. It went for \$225,000!

Sometimes the value of an item is based upon the one who owns it. There is a touching scene in *Toy Story II* when Woody the Toy Cowboy has run away from his boy who no longer seems to love him. Then he looks on the bottom of his boot which is

inscribed with the boy's name, *Andy*. And he is reminded his identity and worth are based upon the one to whom he belongs.

III. So That . . .

In Christ, God has created a new people—the church. Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. However, the verse does not end there. Peter continues . . .

“SO THAT you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful life.” All of the proceeding titles and privileges are given SO THAT we can be about God's work.

You and I are called to accomplish God's work in the world. Take a good look around you. **We're it!** Earlier in the year Bishop Watson preached at the 11:00 service. He made a terrific point when he directed us to look at one another. This is the church. It doesn't get any better than this!

We are God's army. There is no “Special Forces” group out there somewhere with better training and equipment to get the job done. IF it gets done, then it will be by you and me. I don't know about you, but the thought terrifies me! And thrills me!

On May 6, the United Methodist Church will launch a national advertising campaign called ***Rethink Church***. The tag line asks the question, *“What if Church was a Verb?”* The campaign features a series of questions beginning with the words *“What if:”*

- ✓ What if church was less about Sunday, and more about the other days of the week?
- ✓ What if church wasn't just a place we go, but something we do?
- ✓ What if church wasn't just a building, but thousands of doors, each opening to a difference concept or experience of the church?

The church is both noun and verb. We are the people of God sent forth into the world to proclaim the Gospel through word and deed. Who we are informs how we live.

Conclusion

Rabbi Aaron of Karlow was once asked, “What is the greatest sin?” He answered, “The greatest sin a person can commit is to forget that he is a prince, that she is a princess, that we are children of God, the King.”

Who are you? We are born again, children of the king, sons and daughters of the Master of Everything! We are brothers and sisters in Christ, marked by the cross and the empty tomb, dead to sin and alive forevermore. We are heirs of God's promises and his heavenly riches. And today we come to God saying the name “Father.”

Hear the words of 1 Peter again. And hear God call you by name.

“YOU are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, SO THAT you may declare the praises of him who called you out of

darkness and into his wonderful light. Once you were no people, now you are God's people." Amen.