

**+ 1 Peter 2:9-12 + You Are a Praise-Proclaiming People
+ 18th Sunday after Pentecost + 12 October 2014 +**

“Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Do I have a purpose or is my life meaningless?” We all want our lives to have purpose, to have meaning, to mean something. That desire for purpose in our lives starts when we turn into teenagers and grow into adults. We want our lives to mean more than just a certain number of days, hours, minutes, and seconds on this earth.

That pursuit of purpose motivates career choices, education choices, money choices, and even spouse and family choices. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” turns into “What do you want to do with your life?” and “How can I make a difference in the world?” The pursuit of purpose consumes money and time and energy and ability.

Yet so often that pursuit of purpose has a shaky foundation. I try to find meaning for my life in my position at home, at work, at church, in the community. I try to find meaning for my life in what I possess—my home, my car, my spouse and kids, my stuff. I try to find meaning for my life in how others perceive me, especially those whose attention I want—the attractive, the powerful, the influential. Yet what happens when my position changes significantly? What happens when what I possess is taken away? What happens when people perceive me for who I really am—and it’s not pretty? Suddenly my life seems to have no purpose, and the pursuit gets even more desperate. So we work harder. We seek real purpose where it cannot be found and we’re left with nothing, but despair and “Why am I even here?”

Thankfully, this morning we can stop searching for what we will not find in the people and things of this world. The Apostle Peter has something to say about your purpose in life, but before you can understand your purpose, you first have to remember your identity in Christ.

Peter was writing to persecuted Christians who were seriously questioning not only their identity in Christ, but also their purpose. They were starting to feel the heat of hostility from their loved ones, from neighbors, and even from the local officials. They were different. They weren’t going to the city-wide sacrificial feasts to the local god or goddess anymore. They weren’t joining in the immoral practices of their former pagan religion. Because they were Christians, they were strangers, foreigners, even outcasts in their own towns and cities. They felt very alone, very isolated, and they wondered if it was really worth being Christian. They wondered what kind of difference their lives could make when even loved ones opposed their Christian faith.

So Peter took those persecuted Christians back to their identity in Christ. **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...”** Their identity in Christ was so much more than a bunch of isolated outcasts. The same can be said about your identity in Christ. When you take a closer look at the rich phrases that Peter uses, you realize that they are completely opposite of what we were by nature.

“You are a chosen people...a holy nation.” God in his grace specially chose you to be his own through faith in him. You gave him no reason to choose you. You were a slave of sin. You were his enemy. You were a criminal who deserved imprisonment in hell, but now because of Jesus’ precious blood, God sees you through Jesus. Now he sees his child, his beloved, his friend wrapped in the robe of Jesus’ righteousness.

“You are a royal priesthood.” Christ has made you royalty in a world enslaved to sin. Like Paul told us last week, you are sons and daughters of the King of kings. As children of God through the waters of Holy Baptism, you are co-heirs with Christ possessing the inheritance of heaven and eternal life. Jesus has also made you priests with direct, personal access to your heavenly Father because Jesus opened the way to him.

“You are a people belonging to God.” You are God’s personal possession. Kings in Peter’s day would have a special treasury set aside just for themselves safe from attack, revolt, or robbery. Through Jesus, you are God’s special, personal possession protected by him from the attacks of sin, Satan, and death. You belong to the King of kings, who gave everything to make you his own forever.

All of that opposes what we once were. By nature, you and I were without purpose, without meaning, without focus living lives that really didn’t make a difference, but you’ve been given a purpose in Christ! Now who we are in Christ leads to why we’re here—**“...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

You see, when God changed our status and identity, we suddenly had a very real purpose for our lives. Peter explains, **“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received**

mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Once you had no identity except as a follower of your sinful nature or the sinful world or even Satan himself. You had no purpose, but now you **“are the people of God”**. Once you deserved wrath and condemnation for your guilt, but **“now you have received mercy.”** Who we are in Christ leads to why we’re here—**“...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** Our God has transformed us from curse-provoking enemies to his praise-proclaiming people. So if that’s your new purpose in Christ, then what is it going to look like in your daily life?

Peter explains, **“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world....”** Declaring **“the praises of him who called you out of darkness”** means realizing that you’re not a child of darkness anymore. It means that you and I need to realize, like those early Christians, that we’re **“aliens and strangers in the world”**. We live in the world, but we no longer belong to the world. We belong to Jesus who purchased each of us with his own blood. We’re foreigners, strangers, pilgrims passing through this life to our native land of heaven to be with Jesus. Realizing that you’re different from the rest of the world will help you lead a life of thoughts, words, and actions that praise the One who called you out of darkness.

Declaring **“the praises of him who called you out of darkness”** will also help you recognize what is darkness and what is light. **“Dear friends, I urge you... to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”** It’s very tempting to think that a little greed or a little lust or a little arrogance or a little selfishness is no big deal, but such thoughts, such sinful desires are as dark and destructive as theft, immorality, slander, and murder. Peter warns us to abstain, to keep away from such sinful desires, because they **“war against your soul”**. You’ve been called into Christ’s wonderful light to declare his praises. Sinful desires will only drag you back to the darkness.

Rather than indulge in the darkness of sinful desires, Peter urges us to let our lives declare God’s praises. **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”** Jesus had instilled in his disciples an awareness that he could return at any moment. They did the same among the early Christians. As descendants of these faithful believers, we would be wise to do the same. Christ is coming soon, and a time will come when you and I will have to stand before the holy God. If the Lord would return right now, what would he see? Would he see a condemned sinner or a beloved member of **“chosen people”**, his **“holy nation”**, his **“royal priesthood”**, his personal possession? He would see what Jesus did for you. So how will you reflect that in your daily life?

Through faith in Christ, we let our lives **“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”**. We let our decisions declare his praises. We let our priorities declare his praises. We let our use of time and talents and money declare his praises. We carry out our God-given callings at home, at church, and in society in such a way that we declare his praises. We let our lives reflect the reality of who we are in Christ.

That may lead some people to ask the all-important question, “Why? Why do you do this, but refrain from that? Why go to church or read the Bible? Why?” They may not ask such questions with a loving intent, but nevertheless, you know the answer to their question “why”. You know the reason for the hope that you have. You know who you are in Christ, and you know why your life has purpose and meaning when so many others don’t.

So you can let your mouth **“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** You can speak about Jesus, who changed your life, who lived obediently for you, who died innocently for you, who forgives your sin and has opened heaven for you. Then you can watch as the Lord uses even your stumbling praise to change the hearts of pagans, of unbelievers, of the religiously careless, of the prisoners of sin—and you can see why they will **“glorify God on the day he visits us.”**

My friends, you have a purpose. Your life has meaning and can make more of a difference in the life of another than even the most generous donor. **You are a praise-proclaiming people.** You don’t need to spend tons of money and time and effort to realize that purpose, but empowered by Christ, you can devote your life, your time, your treasures, and your effort to declaring **“the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** That, my friends, is your purpose in Christ! Amen.