

1 Peter 2:9-10 + Our Church Gathers and Goes + Series: Our Church
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 12th Sunday after Pentecost + 12 August 2018

Is Cross of Christ YOUR church or OUR church? Over the past couple weeks, we've taken a closer look at that question. We've seen why OUR church exists and what God has given OUR church to do. In spite of all that, we still wrestle with that question—Is this YOUR church or OUR church?

We've seen how and why OUR church worships Christ. We've seen how it's not just YOU who studies God's Word and serves in various ways with various gifts. Instead WE study God's Word together and on our own. OUR study of God's Word then leads US to serve God by serving others with our gifts. Yet how did WE get where WE are today? What were YOU and I before and what has Christ made US to be? And what will WE do about it?

This morning the Apostle Peter helps us to answer those questions—to see what WE once were, to know what WE now are, and to respond in a way that displays OUR thankfulness for what God has made US to be. In doing so, Peter helps us take a closer look at the last two purposes that God has given to OUR church. **OUR CHURCH GATHERS AND GOES.**

At the very end of our reading, Peter looks back to what you and I once were. ***“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.”*** There was a time when you and I were not God's people, when we did not want to gather, when we did not want to come together as God's people.

You see, when God designed humanity, he designed man and woman to be in a perfect relationship with him and each other. He didn't create people to be disconnected and alone. He created them to connect with him and each other in close relationships. He wanted us to do life together. He created us to associate with each other, to have fellowship with each other.

However, when sin came into our world, that unity with God and each other was torn apart. Soon Adam and Eve were pointing fingers of blame at each other. “YOU didn't listen to God! YOU gave me the fruit!” “YOU didn't try to stop me! YOU failed to do YOUR job!” Over time, their sin became YOUR sin as YOUR parents passed their sin on to YOU.

YOUR sin cut YOU off from God's holy love and mercy. God commanded that YOU be holy, but instead by nature, YOU rejected him. By nature, YOU were an unholy, mortal enemy of the holy God. By nature, YOU loved being enslaved to the darkness of sin and unbelief more than the light of God's love. For good reason, YOU deserved nothing from God, but judgment. In his holiness, God condemned YOU and me to eternal death in hell.

That, my friends, is what YOU were, but then Jesus came along and reconciled us to God and each other. Jesus made a world full of YOUs into WE his people—***“the people of God.”*** Peter explains, ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 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.”*** Let's unpack that for a moment because Peter speaks no longer of what YOU were, but of what WE are.

God's holiness demanded death as the punishment for the guilt of our unholy rejection of his holy will. The holy God could not overlook our sins, but this same God is also a loving and forgiving God who did not want to punish his beloved creation. So he sent his only Son Jesus to be the sacrifice for us. Peter explains earlier in his letter, ***“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Jesus came into this world to make you holy by the shedding of his holy, precious blood, to gather you into his church with countless others to be HIS people. HE became your holy Substitute, because you were unholy. HE came to be God's holy servant in your place, because you were a slave to sin. HE came to put himself between you and God, so you would become God's chosen people. HE came to show you mercy by taking on your human flesh in Mary's womb, by allowing himself to be crucified on your cross, and by abandoning your tomb. HE came to call you out of darkness into his wonderful light!

So what are WE now? WE are ***“a chosen people...a holy nation.”*** God in his grace specially chose US to be his own through faith in him. None of us gave him any reason to choose us, but now because of Jesus' precious

blood, God sees US through Jesus. He sees US as his people wrapped up in Christ's holiness—forgiven, cleansed, and saved.

WE are ***"a royal priesthood."*** Christ has made US royalty in a world enslaved to sin. WE are sons and daughters of the King of Kings. As children of God through the waters of Baptism, WE are co-heirs with Christ possessing the inheritance of heaven and eternal life. Jesus has also made US priests with direct, personal access to our heavenly Father. Why? Jesus opened the way for US through the shedding of his blood.

WE are ***"a people belonging to God."*** WE 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, WE are God's special, personal possession protected from the attacks of sin, Satan, and death. WE belong to the King of kings, who gave everything for US.

All of that opposes what we once were. By nature, we were without purpose, without meaning, without focus living lives that really didn't make any difference eternally. Yet WE have been gathered into Christ's church! ***"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."***

Across cultures and races and genders and languages and nations, WE are gathered into Christ's church. Now WE gather as Christ's church nurturing that fellowship, that unity that WE share in Christ. WE encourage and admonish one another. WE support one another and point each other time and again to Jesus, but yet WE have another purpose—***"...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."***

Yes, OUR church gathers together, especially when we take opportunities to nurture the fellowship and unity that Christ has established among us. Yet we don't just gather. We don't form holy huddles. We go! Listen to Peter's words again. ***"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."***

Now what does that mean to ***"declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"***? It means that God had a purpose when he called you out of the darkness of sin and unbelief. God knew what he was doing when he called US to faith in him. He has a job for US to do as his chosen people.

When you have good news, what do you normally do with that good news? If you win an award or scholarship or get accepted into the college you always wanted, you can't wait to tell your family and friends. If you get engaged, once you get past the joyful screaming, you can't wait to tell your family and friends, even acquaintances. If you find out you're expecting, you can't wait to tell your family and friends and everyone around you. If your child does something special, you can't wait to tell everyone about it.

Well, we have some pretty good news to share as God's blood-bought, Christ-cleansed people. In fact, it's not just "pretty good." No, we have the BEST news of all to share! Through Christ and his Word, God ***"called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*** So what are you going to do with that good news? Save it for a rainy day? Tuck it away in your closet for safe-keeping? Put it on the shelf where it'll gather dust? Absolutely not!

God calls US to go and declare his praises. God calls US to tell others of his love. God calls US to proclaim the life and salvation that is ours in Jesus! We want our relatives, our friends, our classmates, our co-workers to be blood-bought, Christ-cleaned people of God too! We want God to call them out of the darkness of sin and unbelief through hearing that good news of Jesus. We want to see them in heaven too. So WE go!

As God's blood-bought, Christ-cleansed people, WE have a job to do as individuals sharing the good news of our Savior, inviting them to ***"come and see"*** what their loving God has done for them in Jesus. WE as a congregation also have a job to do—to not sit back and leave the task of outreach to the pastor and a few hardy souls, nor to simply be a WELS outpost surviving by the skin of our teeth on the WELS frontier. No, WE are to be a beacon of Christ's light of life to people enveloped in the darkness of unbelief. When we realize that proclaiming God's love in Christ is OUR purpose, then declaring God's praises will permeate every aspect of OUR ministry as a congregation and OUR lives as individual believers in Christ. We gather and go.

So is Cross of Christ YOUR church or OUR church? Remember what YOU once were and remember what Christ has made US to be. He has gathered US together as his Church, leading US to joyfully and willingly gather together to encourage each other and grow as God's people. Jesus has made US the blood-bought, sin-cleansed people of God. So now WE go to ***"declare the praises of him who called US out of darkness."*** Amen.