

“Out of Darkness”
(1st Peter 2:9)
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have had the very short, but very powerful letter of 1st Peter in front of us as of late:

Two Sundays ago -- March 4th -- we were reminded that now that Christ is risen we see the bigger picture: heaven is our home and in the meantime we are exiles passing through and so we conduct ourselves with a holy fear so that we hold on to faith in our Living Lord instead of going along with a world that wants to tear itself away from the Lord. (1st Peter 1:17)

Last Sunday -- March 11th -- we considered how the Resurrected Lord equips us to cope with unjust suffering along the way and the endurance which not only demonstrates that the Living Lord Jesus is with us (you are able “to go on” because Jesus is holding you up!), but that same endurance also acts as a witness to others in the world. (1st Peter 2:19-20) When you keep serving and forgiving and loving, people start to wonder: “where does such a life come from?” You know the answer!

Today -- March 18th -- we receive a fantastic testimony about your true identities now that the Savior has conquered death and about what it is our lives are now all about. 1st Peter 2:9 will be our focus and it is powerful description of the new life we have in the One who is risen!

Here is the text:

1st Peter 2:9: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

We need this Word from the Lord. The reason Peter is writing this letter to the scattered Christians throughout the Roman Empire is because they are going through all kinds of struggles. Keep in mind that elsewhere in the Bible Rome is called “Babylon” referring to it being steeped in false religion and phenomenal immorality (cf. Romans 14:8). We are in the same boat today...we are immersed in false teaching and we live in a world that has lost its moral compass. All of these are incredibly dangerous spiritual threats to us and our families. So the Christians back in Peter’s time were “the easy and constant targets of ridicule and

persecution.” (Concordia Journal, Jan. 2002, Vol 28, Num 1, 110). And because this situation is the same today, we really need this message from God through First Peter!

One of the examples of the phenomenal confusion – a form of getting you to question your faith -- that is out there is represented by a recent (April 17, 2014) TIME article “In Praise of Darkness” by Barbara Brown Taylor. Interestingly while Ms. Taylor is criticizing many Christian churches for not dealing with the darkness that affects us all, she – at the same time – lumps all Christian churches together. She points out that through the dark times in life we often grow the most; the darkness is an important part of life. That much is true. But she goes on to criticize those Christian traditions who insist on this superficial – what she calls – “solar spirituality” that insists that with true faith everything is great and LIGHT all the time, but once we encounter darkness, the Church doesn’t know what to do with this! She goes so far as to write, “Christianity has never had anything nice to say about darkness.”

She actually makes a valid point about some churches today. But we aren’t one of them. Our tradition acknowledges that the fact of the matter is that we are in a battle! And there are many times that the true Christian enters into dark times, times of suffering, times of feeling discouraged, times of spiritual uncertainty, times when God just feels hidden (we Lutherans appreciate the aspect of God called *Deus Absconditus* or the Hidden God). Furthermore, we fully acknowledge that in these dark times, God is working to bless us! More importantly, however, Ms. Taylor makes a false argument: that because darkness can sometimes be used for good, that it is always good. No it isn’t. Sometimes, it’s really bad. When darkness is spiritual confusion and unbelief, then that darkness can lead people to condemnation and life in eternity without God (this is how the word “darkness” is used in 1st Peter).

This is an example of the world generating road blocks against your faith. These are little attacks that you get from sources like books, magazines, television, friends – esp. those who don’t know Christ – and needless to say the greatest source of in-your-face images and words is now before us in smart phones, i-pads and laptops. How much of this helps your faith? How much of this draws you closer to Christ? What words and images are bombarding your eyes, your ears and your mind? Is it dark or is it light?

There is old saying, “garbage in, garbage out.” But if what you receive is good, then good things flow from you. If you receive darkness, darkness comes out; but if you receive light, light comes out. If you receive Christ, Christ comes out!

So God is concerned about our darkness to the extent that when Jesus rose from the dead, He changed believers in the True God in who and what they are.

To encourage you and to strengthen you as you go through life, being harassed, being attacked, being tempted to sin, etc., the Lord proclaims the truth of your new identity in Christ at 1st Peter 2:9 (I am here giving abbreviations of the four points):

1. You are chosen.
2. You are a royal priest.
3. You are holy.
4. You are a jewel.

And with this phenomenal new identity (verse 9), comes also a new priority in what you DO (also verse 9): ***“that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

Through Jesus’ blood and making you right by wrapping you in His righteousness and in His holiness, God wants you to know that you’re chosen! You are chosen by God! This is the truth of God’s Word! Even though you go through this life as an exile or a foreigner, the real amazing thing is that you go through life as one who is ELECT and CHOSEN! And if God chooses you, then He is with you no matter what! God chose Abraham and Abraham could only walk in faith in an amazing journey of life, and the Lord blessed Him every step of the way (even through the tough stuff)...just as He chose Abraham, He chose you in Christ!

But it’s the “royal priest” part that really blows me away. You see once upon a time in the Old Testament you could never put these two words side-by-side. Priests were priests, kings were kings. In fact when the first King of Israel – Saul – tried to do what only the prophet Samuel could do in his priestly office, Saul was severely punished (1st Samuel 13)! The work of the priest – even for the nation of Israel – was given to a special group called the Levites. These priests were apart from and above the rest of the people. All I’m saying is that back in the day the people of God were not fully priests, and they NEVER had the authority of neither a priest NOR (esp.) the king! All of that has changed. Augustine: “In ancient times only one high priest was anointed, but now all Christians are anointed.” [Bray, Gerald, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture*, New Testament XI, 87)

The highest office is that of priest. You are a priest of God. You’ve got the highest office (Luther says that “[f]aith alone is the true priestly office,” AE 35:101). Pastors only come into existence by virtue of the Gospel given to the priests, the office given to the priests, and the call which the priests extend to the pastor. But no one is above the priest. The priest has direct access to God! But as a priest, the Scriptures say you are also “royal” which is to say you are given the authority of the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people nowadays in Christian circles

say critically, “Only God can forgive sins.” Well, that needs to be adjusted. God calls you, makes you a priest, and then gives you His royal authority and says when you forgive someone on earth they are forgiven in heaven (John 20). God works through His royal priests. That’s you!

Thirdly, you’re holy; and fourthly you are His jewel. That means you are set apart from the world – yes you’re in it, but not of it – your life is of a different quality: you’ve been made holy in Christ. You go through life as one forgiven and as one who has received the Holy Spirit. This means that you don’t just live for yourself. You know how people say, “Look out for [or] live for #1?” Well, they mean #1 is YOU; but the Christian means that #1 is Jesus Christ! We live for Christ!

I can tell you loud and clear and I’m sure you can relate: I would not be doing ½ the things I do if I was living for myself. Just wouldn’t happen. Way too much work! But as a Christian, I praise God for my wife, for my children, and for my parish, because now Christ has redefined my whole life: I serve Christ, so I serve you, as a result, I serve my children; as a matter of course, I serve my wife. The same is true for you. You are holy now: set apart, so you live for God and as you do, it is the last description in 1st Peter 2:9 that is totally awesome: our ESV translation says “his own possession,” but it may be translated as “jewel.” You are now God’s jewel. You are like a treasure to God. That is how vital you are as His child and He won’t let go of His jewel!

But man in our sin we resist this new identity! And it is the worst thing we could possibly do. Can you imagine that you gave a gift to someone that you really care about and you put a lot of time and effort in that gift and then the gift is treated like trash?! You present the gift, but the other person doesn’t even take the time to unwrap it; they act like they don’t care and they toss it in the closet.

That’s what we do as sinners towards God.

God says, “My child you are chosen!” And instead we act like we are having an identity crisis. We let ourselves be blown around by the wind and act on sinful impulse, forgetting who we are.

God says, “My child you are my royal priest!” And instead we act like we have time for everything else rather than the time it takes to come to God in prayer. We act like everything else in this world is more important than God.

God says, “My child I’ve made you holy and my jewel!” And instead we get tangled up in the sin of this world and throw mud on our holiness in Christ and we don’t act like we are God’s jewel, but we act like we are the world’s junk.

For this, Jesus came. For this, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. For this, Jesus is the FIRST Priest and the FIRST King; for this, Jesus is the HEAD Priest who gave Himself as the Sacrifice for our sins; and for this, Jesus is the HEAD King who conquered in glorious might the works of the devil so that you may have life!

And we are forgiven, then we are moved to do what we are designed to do: ***“[to] proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

If you know who you really are, then – as Luther says – “out with it, and freely and openly confess this before the world – preach, praise, glorify, and give thanks! This is the real and only worship of God, the true office of the priest, and the finest, most acceptable offering.” [AE 14:32]

The “excellencies” are the great, heroic, mighty, and glorious deeds of God: He lived, and died, and rose for SINNERS! He came for the lost; He came to those who were not a people {who really didn’t have any life}, to the rejected, to the ones who had not received any mercy! Out with it! Tell of His great work to save all sinners. Now we are the people who were once not people; now we have received mercy who once had no mercy. Out with it Christian! Speak up in your words and deeds. You don’t even have to quote Scripture! You don’t even have to write a sermon! You don’t even have to get on a soap box! Out with it! Just talk and live like those who used to be stuck in the darkness and desperation of SIN and as those who are now delivered into Mercy, Forgiveness, and Hope through the Risen Lord Jesus Christ! Out with it priest! This is your sacrifice! We are to “proclaim”...it means to broadcast. Did you know that EVERYONE broadcasts something...EVERYONE has a message...what’s your message?!

Help people who don’t know, priest, help them to see that Jesus has come to deliver us from the darkness and power of the devil and that Jesus has won for us light through the forgiveness of sins!

“True believers cannot keep still, they simply must speak out with lip and with life. Thus they function as a royal priesthood and ever offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. This is the confessional and the missionary spirit and activity of God’s people; for the sake of this God lets us remain in the world.” (R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter...*, 103)

And while you are in the world, you have a fantastic identity and mission and it's all because of the identity and mission of your Savior: He saved you and He sends you! Rejoice! Your life in Christ is awesome and we have much very good work to do which He will do in and through us!