

Foreigners and Exiles

Real ID

11/8/20

Welcome/intro/vision

If you're just joining us we're in a series of messages called REAL ID

We're talking about who the world says we are, who we think we are, and who God says we are

And the difference it makes if we can sort that all out and let God give us our REAL identities

And this is an important conversation at any time, but it's all the more important right now as we're in the aftermath of one of the most contentious elections in any of our lifetimes.

We've got a couple of our goals for our church during this season:

We want our community to be engaged in the political sphere, but we want to do so anchored in something much more important than the political sphere.

AND we want to love and serve one another as a church with people in our church with all sorts of differing political views

AND we want to love our surrounding neighbors who don't share our faith, even across political lines

Few things do this better than putting our identity in who God says we are so that all our other identities recede to a distant second--American, Republican, Democrat and everything else

I've been thinking about THIS Sunday for weeks the weekend after the election, wondering how things would be on this day

Obviously I don't know how everyone of us voted but if I'm reading us right, we're somewhere around half-and-half in terms of Democrats and Republicans—much like our state!

For some of you that's great news, for others of you, you're utterly appalled that might be the case! But I'm really proud of that. Listen, if you want to find a church where everyone voted just like you

About five minutes away from either one of our campuses there are churches that are probably 90% however you voted and if that's more to your liking I'll totally help you to find those

What we're doing here is different. And it takes more work. And I'm proud of us, but here we are and we've got to figure out how to live this out as a community because we're figuring this out not just for us

See, the easiest way to generate unity is us vs. them—we need to rally together to fight against those people over there, whoever they are. That’s how most calls to unity come about

But Christian unity is never us vs. them. Christian unity is us united for the SAKE of them

We are called to be united together not to deeper entrench hatred and vilifying our neighbors

We are called to unite together in order to love and serve our neighbors, like Jesus called us to do

And sometimes we’re going to disagree with people—sometimes there are things happening around us that as Christians we HAVE to say “NO” to

But the Scriptures teach and we believe and want to practice here that every time God says no it’s always there to serve his larger yes

God says no to sin because it’s death for us. So God’s no to sin is there to serve his yes to life and goodness

all of God’s no’s are there to serve his larger yes, ultimately pointing to God’s yes to everyone in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—God’s great yes to all of humanity forever and ever

And so if all God’s “no’s” are there to serve his larger yes

then we as Christians individually and collectively are here to do everything we can to be in step with that as well—that the things that we have to say “no” to are always only there to serve God’s larger yes

We are here as Christ-followers to demonstrate and declare God’s yes to our neighbors, our nation, and our world

But if we lose ourselves and surrender our identities to much smaller and less important things, we’re going to fall into the same tribalism traps and destructive battles the world is caught up in and Christians just become one more mean, nasty tribe.

When our real identity is who God declares we are in Christ, it means everything is different about us, which means that we do everything differently

And so as things unfold, whether your candidate is eventually on the winning or losing side of one of the most contentious elections in our lifetime

There’s a real durable, everlasting Identity that God is offering us in Christ Jesus

a real identity that grounds us and shapes us and equips us to live here in this place, in this time, in a way that is good, fruitful, wise

What does it mean to live as a child of God watching election results SLOWLY unfold and in the aftermath of an election, win or lose? That’s what we’re going to get today from 1 Peter 2

I'm going to read chunks of 1 Peter 2, and I'm going to highlight every place where Peter is making identity statements, giving these people their new names, declaring to them who they are as Christians

*...you are a **chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** ¹⁰ **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.***

When I was a kid growing up, two of my most favorite people in the world were Oma and Opa, my mom's parents who lived on Lake Wylie just outside of Charlotte

It was a house full of love and welcome

Oma always, always always had great food including made-from-scratch, home-made cabbage and apple strudels that took all day to make for the holidays

Oma especially was a larger than life character in my life—full of love and enthusiasm for her grandkids—but she was also a go-getter

At age 40 she went to work as a teller at a local bank by the time she retired, she was vice president of international at her bank

Oma passed away back in 2008, but my Opa is still alive at 96 and he still lives in that same house

Now my mom has a sister, she's my crazy Aunt Wendy and she was the wild child--and Oma was fond of calling her the wild child!

Aunt Wendy gave Oma more than a few gray hairs and kept her up more than a few nights with worry

And a couple years ago now, Aunt Wendy was about to become a grandmother for the first time, and in a delightful move that literally brought tears to my eyes

Wild child Aunt Wendy decided that she wanted to be Oma for her grandkids.

This wonderful beloved title of Oma was passed on from one generation to the next, even in spite of some of the factors that might have mitigated against it.

In the passage we just read, Peter is doing a massive beloved title transfer.

He's taking some favorite titles that once were exclusively for his own Jewish people, and transferring those titles to anyone and everyone who puts their trust in Christ

Chosen people, royal priesthood, God's special possession, the people of God

All of these are names and titles straight up lifted from the Old Testament that were once reserved for the Jewish people

These badges of belonging and being God's chosen, special people was what sustained many of the Jewish people through wars and exile

Even when it didn't look like they were anything special due to their circumstances, even when nations rolled over them--this was who they were.

These were treasured names, treasured statuses, anchor points for the Jewish people in understanding their identities

And now, Peter, who was a good Jew, says that the one perfect Jew has died and been resurrected again

in order to make a way for these titles to be transferred to anyone who puts their faith in Jesus, the one who is the perfect fulfillment of all these titles

To put your faith in Christ, is to be joined with Jesus and to be called a chosen person, to participate in a royal priesthood, to be God's special possession and to know that you are a part of the people of God

These are both individual names AND a collective identity with all the rest of the Christ-followers who share in this same name, who share in this same fellowship with Jesus

And just like these names and titles sustained the Jewish people through wars and exile and long, dark stretches of their history

Peter wants the Christians he's writing to in the first century, many of them were likely slaves, most of them from lower places on the food chain, some of whom are experiencing persecution or at least the threat of persecution

to hang onto and know that these things titles and names are granted to them and are strong enough to carry them TOGETHER through all the storms of life in the ancient Roman world

And today, as we read these words 2,000 years later, there's an invitation to receive this same transfer of title and to live it out with passion and conviction

both individually AND collectively, no matter how you voted or how things turn out in the coming days and weeks

If you're a Christ-follower, whether your candidate wins the election or loses the election, you are a part of a parallel and distinct and separate community with these as your permanent names and titles

Nothing about who you are has fundamentally changed because who you are was not on the ballot and the vote was not a referendum on your identity

That identity is secured in Christ: you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, a part of the people of God

And with those titles comes a responsibility, a meaning, a purpose, and signposts for how we're to live in this place

Peter says that with these titles comes our why. Why are we here? Why are we a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, the people of God?

“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you”

The “why” behind life with our new name is all about worship.

You are given this title transfer so that YOU and Y'ALL together might declare God's praises.

Why do we worship, why do we sing in our services, even when we can't all be together to experience it together?

Because worship is WHY God gave us these priceless, eternally significant names

We worship God because we were made to worship something, everyone worships something: money, jobs, the kids, people's approval, our own comfort, politics, whatever

To worship something is to elevate it to the most important place in your life and we all do it. Worship like an electric current running—it flows through you, you can steer it and direct it, but you can't turn it off

and if you make the wrong choice with your worship, everything and everyone around you suffers for it, and so do you

And the way that you and I were designed to live is to point the flow of our worship towards the God of the cosmos and when we do that we're living according to the design of our souls

And we flourish, we're fruitful, we bless others

You're getting the title of God's special possession so that you might finally worship exactly the way God originally designed you to

And each week we gather and worship through music and Scripture we're constantly mis-spending and mis-directing our flow of worship

And when we gather together and worship together, even if it's virtually, we're re-integrating, re-gathering and repenting of all of our mis-spent and mis-directed worship

And what happens on Sunday morning week in and week out over time is to spill out into the rest of our lives—that we might live lives that declare the praises of God, that we might live lives that are all worship to God

What if we responded to the outcome of the election as worship to God? Whether in victory or defeat, what if you saw all of that as simply raw material with which you could worship God?

What if we as a church disagreed with one another politically in a way that was worship to God?

What if we dealt with the family member we can't stand as worship to God?

What if we dealt with our own sadness or took up causes and fought for our issues as worship and offering to God?

What if every season, every work, every relationship, every email, every project at work or at school, every conversation

was done as worship, congruent with the titles God has given you: that you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession

That doesn't mean we don't fight! We just fight differently. That doesn't mean we don't engage. We just engage differently.

When we receive the title transfer in Jesus, we become a part of a new community and one way to think about the whole course of the rest of our lives is a process of merging our behavior into congruence with who we already are in Christ

Now Peter knows that all of that is a little theoretical, so he takes another pass at it, to help them to understand what all this means for how they are to relate to the world around them

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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.

An author I read several years ago made the case that the greatest miracle in Christian history is the black church in America

I mean, think about it—here are people wrenched from their homeland and enslaved and somehow in the midst of the distorted Christianity of their white slave holders, by the miracle of God's amazing grace they hear the real story

The story of salvation and Jesus's death for all people that dignifies all humanity

And the spirituals they sang together often while working in the fields rang out with the hope they had in Jesus

And one of the most common themes of their songs was the theme of being a sojourner, passing through this world on their way to the next

They were enslaved, but they found hope and strength by putting on the identity of being the children of God who were on their way to their true home

Peter pivots from a handful of previously exclusively Jewish titles and in order to help us understand what exactly it means to inhabit or live out of those titles, he introduces these new titles: **foreigners, exiles**, other translations use **sojourners**

And it's important to **remember Peter's first audience**—these are people who like the American slaves had no position or rank or power to change very much about their circumstances

And we have to **remember the earlier titles** that Peter gave to them to help inform what foreigner, exiles and sojourners means: Chosen people, royal priesthood, God's special possession, the people of God

because if we interpret to mean something like we're just a tourist who doesn't care what happens to the people here, we miss the whole point.

Living like a tourist who's just visiting and doesn't care what's happening here, that's not loving our neighbor as ourselves, that's not living a life of worship.

What does it mean to live this life as a foreigner and exile and sojourner in relation to the world as it now is who is committed to a life of worship as the people of God?

We kicked this around in my small group this past week and had a great conversation that has stuck with me as I've been trying not to obsessively check the news headlines this week for news about how slow vote counters are.

And as I was praying about this during Wednesday mid-day prayer, what I prayed was that I would watch the election results unfolding a bit from a distance, from the mouth of the empty tomb

The resurrection of Jesus is my anchor, secures my new identity, opens the path to my true home--But I'm facing outward—towards the world.

I am ready to step into the world and towards the world as an exile, a sojourner, a foreigner to serve as an ambassador of Christ in whatever way he would have me to and that loves and serves my neighbors according to his purposes

And doing that as a foreigner, a sojourner, an exile means a couple of things

I do that with **humility: Everyone who disagrees with me is not an idiot**. Everyone who disagrees with me is made in God's image and forgiven with me at the cross

And **humility: I could be wrong**. I've missed God's purposes before

And even more importantly, **I could be right**, which requires an extra dose of humility because I'm the most tempted to be the most self-righteous when I'm pretty sure I'm right! Beware of me when I'm right, beware of you when you're right

And I have to recognize that ***There is a time to back down and there is a time make a stand.***

It might be sooner or later than your natural inclination, depending on your personality.

Some of us are more deferential or accommodating in our conflict styles, others of us like a good fight!

So what comes most natural to you may or may not be the right thing to do at any given moment

And how and where and when you do EITHER ONE of these may or may not be popular with the people around you or on your social media news feed

The call from the Scriptures is to *stay in step with the Spirit, not in step with our feelings nor in step with the crowds!*

Jesus had his moments where he retreated from a conflict, moments where he totally de-escalated or mediated a conflict towards negotiation or peace

and then he had these moments where he made major, huge, counter-cultural stands for what he knew to be right

There is a time to back down and there is a tie to make a stand as foreigners, exiles, sojourners here in this place

And finally, back to where we began—as we **fight for unity with other sojourners:**

TOGETHER as Christians we embrace our new names: Chosen people, royal priesthood, God's special possession, the people of God SO THAT we might live lives of worship

And as we TOGETHER embrace our identities as foreigners and exiles and sojourners as a community, we fight for Christian unity

But Christian Unity is Never Us VS. Them but Us Unified for the SAKE of them

Learning together how we're united for the sake of communicating God's great yes our neighbors and our nation

This is what we're doing in this season, across political lines, as Christ-followers, while we watch and wait for the slowest ever election results to trickle in

Move now to a time of discussion at our live sites and if you're not at a live site today never fear I'm going to host a live Zoom call small group discussion

And I'd LOVE for you to join me, just click on the link below in the show more section

We've had some fantastic small group discussions together over the past couple of weeks and we'd love for you to join in the fun

And if this is new or a little foreign to you, we're going to live stream MY small group discussion right here in just a minute, so you can just hang out and watch as we discuss the questions

Here are the questions for site hosts and for the Zoom call

1. **What makes our actions worship?** If we're given these great new names in order that we might live lives that declare the praise of God, what makes everyday life and activities worship?
2. **What do you think it means to live as sojourners during and after this election?**
3. **How do we as Christians and as a church cultivate a unity that blesses our neighbors?**