

## Who Are You? 1 Peter 2:11-20

Our text for today is the Epistle lesson read earlier from St. Peter's first letter.

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

Who are you? Have you ever seriously thought about that? And I don't mean to consider who you are according to your name, but who are you according to, and in relationship, to God?

To help us consider this question, I'll read a portion of our text again.

*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation...*

*...Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*

This "who are you" question begins with your baptism. In baptism you are put to death and born anew, you are given a new name, a new identity, and a particular calling. By faith you are a child of God, called out of the world, which is why God proclaims through Peter, that you are sojourners and exiles in this world. This is why we often say that Christians are '*in the world,*' but not *OF* the world. You are to be different, a living witness to God in Christ Jesus, in everything you do.

As good Lutherans, we should ask, what does this mean?

Maybe it will help to consider it this way. How many people take up some cause, get all excited about it, and even speak boldly about it? But, when push comes to shove, it seems they fail to apply that cause to themselves. They seem rather ingenuous. I saw a bumper sticker that read "Live Simply," but it was on a brand new Mercedes Benz AMG, 2 seat, \$100,000 plus sports coupe.

Or maybe consider this one. A woman was stopped behind another car at the stop light, but when the light turns green, the car in front of her did not immediately go. So, she honks her horn, sticks her head out the window and screams something at the driver ahead about their intelligences, question whether the driver's parents were married?

When they finally go through the intersection, a police officer pulls her over. When he approaches, she asks what the problem is; she wasn't speeding, and she obviously didn't run a red light. He says, "well, I saw the Christian fish symbol on your trunk, the "follow me to church" and "honk if you love Jesus" bumper stickers on your car, and I concluded from your language and behavior, that it was a good possibility you were driving a stolen vehicle."

OK it might bring a chuckle. Hopefully it also brought you a moment of somber reflection? Remember our text? Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Consider yourself! You have been given a new life to live, called by God to serve Him by serving and loving your neighbor in all your various vocations. You have been given His name, you are a Christian, but do you live in your vocations according to God's will for those vocations? Are you a

living witness of Christ in your life?

Yes, it is true, that we are the redeemed people of God. Yes, that means that our failures to live perfectly according to those various vocations are forgiven, but forgiveness is not a license to continue in sinful behavior. God's command to holy living according to the Law is still in force for Christians. In fact, it frees us to live.

Maybe we should rephrase the question and say, "what has God put me here to do?" As sojourners and exiles in the world, we can put the question this way, "what has God put me in His creation to do? What is my place in regard to the rest of God's creation?"

Christian freedom is much different than freedom as seen by the world. The world's view of freedom has to do with "my" rights. We have been taught to think of it as, "I am free to live my life however I want." Such thinking revolves around the great "ME."

Christian freedom is different, you are to be a slave of none, but a servant to all. You were placed in creation by God, and called to be different, in order to serve others, not self.

You and I know this from the Word of God, and as you remember the parable of the last day, and the sheep and the goats, we're given a hint of how that is to work out.

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* (Mt 25:34-40 ESV)

Each and every person that shares this spinning globe called earth, is our neighbor. How you and I, saints of God, live in relationship to our neighbors, is holy work – it is the work that God has given us to do. It is why we need to be able to answer the question, "who are you?"

Let me give a couple examples of how this plays out. Some of you are a husband or a wife. Are you doing what God has called you to do? Husbands have specific guidelines in regard to living toward their wives, and wives have specific guidelines in regard to living toward their husbands. Both husbands and wives are called *to love* their spouse. This means you are not married **BECAUSE** you are in love, but you are joined to one another so that you **MIGHT** love one another. Or, to say it another way, you are husband and wife **in order to love** one another. You are called by God to be married, it is your privilege and honor to love your spouse. This is your task, your calling, your vocation as a spouse – to love one another.

In fact, it is your task to love your neighbor as yourself, all your neighbors, not just the one you married. This is not about some feeling you are to have in your heart toward your neighbor. To love your neighbor is an act of the will to nurture, care for, help, live your entire life selflessly in assistance to your neighbor.

This is not an option. It is not based upon your feelings. It is your duty as a neighbor, commanded by God for you to do – even when you do not feel love.

Parents are given children by God in order to raise them in the nurture and instruction of the Lord. And yet, how many times do we put other things in the way of that obligation? God did not say to raise them to be great athletes, yet how often do parents teach children that sports are more important than God by their decision to make one or the other a priority on Sunday mornings?

How often do parents fail to discipline because our children might resent us. God says that to love, is to discipline, and that a father who does not discipline his child, hates that child. (Prov. 13:24)

How often does the world get in the way of the vocation of family? Everybody seems to be going their own way, doing their own thing. Even in families, too often it is the great “me” who reigns supreme because we do not understand Christian freedom. When we pursue only our own *personal* interests, oftentimes, it is the family that suffers.

Dearly beloved of God, when we are being what God created us to be, in our various vocations, then is when we are truly free.

Do you remember the garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve were kicked out? What was going on? Adam was living without sin. He was doing what God had commanded him to do – having dominion over creation, one with his wife, not eating of the one tree in the middle of the garden - and he was perfectly free. He had joy when God walked with him in the garden in the cool of the day. But, he was not autonomous, he did not make up his own rules.

God had given him the law, God gave him the will to live under that law, and Adam was totally dependent upon God for everything.

When was Adam happy? When he was living in God’s Law. He was profoundly happy because he was doing exactly what he was created to do. How can you be happy? Do what God has called you to do, with all your might.

Adam was free before the fall because he was living within the parameters God has set up for him. He became a slave when he fell into sin.

Dear friends in Christ, the Law is not sinful, it is freeing. When we know the parameters, we are free to live without fear. Have you ever noticed that sinful actions take place after the cover of darkness, behind closed doors, or when people think their actions are hidden from the eyes of others? And people caught up in sin always seem to be looking over their shoulder, always afraid they are going to get caught.

What kind of people do not like the sight of a police officer, or call them nasty names? Only those who are breaking, or who have broken, the law.

I can speak for myself. I am incredibly free and happy when I am loving my wife. When we spend time together as a family, when we are fishing together, when are working on a project together, we share great joy. It is tough now that the boys are not around much.

When I fulfill my vocation as a pastor, and forgive sin, I have incredible joy. As I teach Bible Study, I am filled with joy, it is a favorite time – I get very excited, for I love it. And, I hope those attending love it as well. These are the times I am most free, as I fulfill my various vocations, doing as God has

called me to do in each of them.

One last time, I ask you, who are you? While we are most free when we live according to the law in our various vocations, we prefer slavery. Yes, you heard me correctly, I said that we prefer slavery. We like to put ourselves into the slavery of sin by living outside the law. Too often, selfishness reigns in our lives, it is **ME** first!

Yes, we know what we should be doing, but we continually give up our vocations in order to wallow in slavery, wallow in sinfulness.

God loves us! His love is not some feeling in His heart toward us. His love was put into action. God's love was enfleshed in the person of Jesus Christ. God's love guided the hand of Roman soldiers who punished Jesus for our lack of love. **AND**, for the joy set before Him, in great love for you and me, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, that we might be the children of God.

Beloved of God, that is why it is important to remember who you are.

You are a baptized child of God. You are baptized into Christ's death; your sins have been buried with Christ. You are baptized into Christ's resurrection, you have been raised to live a new life, the forgiven life of a child of God.

The greatest joy of my special vocation as a called servant of God, is to deliver to you what Christ purchased with His innocent suffering and death, and sealed with His glorious resurrection. I am free because I do not have to invent how to do my vocation. God has given me very specific instructions to follow in my Pastoral vocation, so that I might do so according to His will.

I am called to speak words of forgiveness to you, and in so doing, your sins are gone.

I am to feed you Christ's body and blood, and in your eating and drinking, Christ delivers forgiveness, eternal life, salvation, and strengthening of faith.

In these means, Christ's righteousness is given to you, and by faith it is made your very own.

Who are you? You are God's beloved children, redeemed by Christ, freed to live in His holy name.  
Amen.