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“Christians in an Unchristian World: Holiness”

Text: 1 Peter 1:1-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who are you? Some people would answer that with their name - I'm a Douthwaite. That identifies my ancestry, my nationality, where I'm from. You can take that information onto an ancestry web site and find out all kinds of things. Some, though, might answer with what they do - their job defining who they are, their level of education, their skills and abilities. Others might answer that question by saying that they're a work in progress, that who they are is not yet finished. They're still working on that, defining that, shaping that. And, for some people, the answer changes. One such example that has been in the news is those who claim to change their gender - that I grew up a man but now believe myself to be a woman.

As we begin our examination of First Peter tonight, Peter starts out by giving quite a different answer than all that. He starts out by saying that *who you are* is one ***who has been born again***. That is the identity that is above all other identities: that **you are a born again, baptized, child of God**.

Now to us who hold baptism in high regard, that may not sound surprising. But to the folks Peter was writing to, first century Christians under persecution and scattered throughout the region, forced from home and work, whose future was uncertain and for whom life was quite difficult, this was critical. For as a Christian, *you* do not define who you are, and *the world* does not define who you are - Jesus does. And His definition and identity is a reality far greater than your name, your nationality, your work, or any other way you think of yourself. *Who are you?* You are baptized. You are a child of your Father who art in heaven.

And that means a number of things. First of all, Peter says, it means that even if you are homeless here on earth, you have a home, ***an inheritance, that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you***. And you, ***by God's power are being guarded through faith*** for life in that home. As Jesus told His disciples just before His crucifixion: *I will not leave you orphans* (John 14:18). Those who are born again as children of God are cared for by their Father, through Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. You're not on your own. God does not leave or forsake His children.

Part of that care, however, Peter goes on to say, is trial or testing. Precious metals are put into the fire to burn off their impurities and make them even more pure and valuable. And so you, more precious than anything in this world, as the crown of God's creation, will be

proved in the same way. Not as punishment, but in love, to loose our grip and hold on the things of this world, that we cling to God alone. That when He comes again, we not be holding on to our false gods and idols, but rejoice in Him and, as Peter says, ***obtain the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls***. You will not understand God unless you realize how important that is - how important you are - to Him.

Therefore, Peter says, think this way, that this is who you are. Not defining yourself as the world does, nor living as you used to live, but living a life of **holiness**.

Now that needs some explanation, for usually when we think of holiness we think of sinlessness and perfection. And certainly we *should* be like that - but as you know, we cannot. Not on our own, at least. Peter knew that well. Peter the denier. Peter who was known for putting his foot in his mouth and messing up. Peter knew quite well that if we are sinless it is only because our sins have been washed away in the flood of Jesus' blood and forgiveness from *Calvary's Holy Mountain* (LSB #435). And if we are perfect, it is only because His perfection has been imputed to us. And as that is true, it is the reason for our rejoicing.

But to be holy means to be *set apart*. And as we have been set apart from sin and death by Jesus, by baptism, by our being united to Him in His death and resurrection; as we have been set apart from the world by being called into the church; as we have been set apart from our former ignorance by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit - be who you are, Peter says. Wherever you are and however you are. For even in times of persecution, in times of dispersion, in times of trouble, this reality does not change. This is the reality and foundation that will carry you through all trials and temptations, and even through death itself, to life forever with God. For the things of this world are passing away, Peter says, ***but the word of the Lord remains forever***.

His word of promise, His word of grace, His word of forgiveness, His word which is living and active and working in you. His word that named you as His son or His daughter.

So to **be holy** is to live as one who has been set apart. To think differently, live differently, speak differently, act differently, value differently, and even die differently than the world. It is what we see in Christ Jesus, and what got Him opposed all the way to the cross. And some of that was then happening to the apostles and the Christians that Peter was writing to. And some is happening to Christians today.

But if you know who you are, then none of that *really* matters. For you, your future, and your home are safe in Christ. Guarded by Him. Or as Luther would later write: *And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the kingdom our remaineth* (LSB #656 v. 4).

That doesn't make it easy! Far from it. Satan is going to hound you every step of the way. And that's why Peter is writing to his dear Christians, his flock that has been driven out and scattered. He wants them to know: *there is a greater reality than what is seen and felt*. Yes, you are Christians living in an unchristian world, but you are also living in Christ and Christ in you. Therefore no matter what this world brings upon you, you have confidence and hope. You are children of God, holy and precious to Him, and ***this is the good news that was preached to you***. Do not be afraid to live in that truth, that reality. ***Be holy***, just as Christ is holy, for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.