

You're part of God's group!
1 Peter 2:9-10

Brothers and sisters – If I asked you the question “who are you?” You’d probably answer by saying “I’m Jeff, I’m John, I’m Chuks, I’m Laurie, I’m so and so... that’s my name”

And if I asked you again... “Who are you?” You might give me a puzzled look and say “Well I’m Jeff Skipper, as opposed to Jeff Sutherland or Jeff Boissonneault, or I’m John Gill as opposed to John Leacock or John Wang...”

But I’d ask again... “Who are you?”

At which point you might go from being puzzled to perplexed and respond “ummm... I’m an older white male, I’m semi-retired, or maybe I’m a senior citizen, or I’m a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, I’m a lawyer, a teacher, a geologist.”

And I’d continue to ask... “Who are you?”

Now at this point some of you might clue in and figure “Oooh! I get it now... I need to give the pastor the right answer that he’s looking for, so you’d say “ Well, I’m a Christian! I’m a believer – a disciple, a follower of Jesus!”

But I’d still ask... “Who are you?”

Brothers and sisters, if you press this question and keep asking it, it becomes evident that it’s actually a difficult question to answer fully, honestly, accurately, completely. Who are we?

I know that at certain points in my life I would have had a pretty quick answer for someone who asked me that, and I wouldn’t have gone any further than that answer – I was a hockey player... a skateboarder, a snowboarder, a rap artist... that was that. End of story.

My identity was defined by the things I was attracted to and I wanted everyone to know about it. In fact, you didn’t really need to ask me who I was, you could tell just by observing me.

When I defined myself as a skater I had the haircut, the clothes, the shoes, I put skateboard stickers all over my binders and textbooks, my board was never very far away, I spent most of my time skateboarding... and I did the same thing when I was really into rap music and snowboarding.

I had chosen these activities, that particular music style, to give definition to who I was, this was the sum total of me.

And as I was reflecting on the whole issue of how we might identify ourselves I noticed that it's pretty much impossible to answer the question "who are you?" in a way which does not, in some manner, relate to other people.

Many of the factors which we choose to base our identity on involve other people, groups of people. Whether it be those who like the same activities as we do, those who have the same taste in music, or come from the same city, the same part of the country - as we do...

Or maybe they went to the same school, worked at the same company, are part of the same union, or belong to the same political party or just simply have the same DNA - as we do.

So much of our identity is related to how we are connected to other people so that they - in part - make us who we are.

And even if you identify yourself as a loner, as someone who doesn't belong anywhere or fit in to the mainstream— even if you believe that what defines you is so unique and individual... it still relates to others by the fact that it sets you apart from them. You can only be unique if there are other people who are different than you so as to provide that contrast.

So... I think the most basic, most honest, most accurate and comprehensive answer we can give to the question "Who are you?" starts with recognizing how our identity is formed by the connections and relationships that we have with others.

And I have to confess that this is a hard truth for me to accept because it's all fine and dandy if those relationships and connections are ones that you like or desire.

I liked being associated with other skateboarders and snowboarders because I liked what it was that we had in common... skateboarding and snowboarding were cool!

But... there are a whole lot of relationships and connections in our lives which we might not think are cool and which we don't want and we would rather not have them contributing to our identity.

To complicate matters, many of our relationships and connections are simply imposed on us, and if we don't think these people are cool enough - we might resent these connections, and we must also just resent simply for the fact that they are implicitly there, without our choosing them.

As they say – you can pick your friends but you can't pick your family.

So we don't choose our family, we also don't choose where we were born, when we were born, or our race or our gender... how we were raised, where our parents sent us to school... there's all sorts of identifiers in our lives which we had no choice over.

When I was growing up and I got to the age where I was struggling to determine if I liked myself or not, and if I was cool enough to like myself – I suddenly realized that many the relationships and connections in my life didn't have that "cool" factor and by implication that meant I didn't either.

My family roots were rural Minnesota farming towns...my dad was a minister, I was a pastors kid, I went to church every Sunday, I went to a Christian school, my body type was tall and skinny, I didn't have a fashion sense for cool clothes... (this picture kind of says it all.)

These things weren't cool – It wasn't like being from New York, or California, Florida - or even Toronto. Or having your

dad working in business, going to the local Public high school, or inheriting genes that made you buff and ripped.

So, I resented many of the relationships and connections which were implicitly part of my life, and I fought against fact that they partially defined me, and I did so by rebelling against them and setting my own terms on how I would relate to them and respond to any expectations they had for me.

Maybe you've responded in a similar fashion to those implicit relationships in your own life and what they expect from you and how they define you?

Maybe there's still a part of you that's dealing with that? That can be a tough struggle – I'm well aware of it! And if something in this opening example about not liking who you are, struggling to accept those implicit relationships or connections in our lives, if that connected with you – and you want to talk some more about it with me, let me know.

But the reason I'm bringing this up brothers and sisters, is because I would like us to consider this morning - the way in which we respond to the implicit relationship and connection that Christ and his Body have with us... especially as it relates to how being a part of the church community at Valleyview, actually forms our a key part of our identity.

Now maybe we didn't realize that being part of a church community is an implicit relationship? And that it contributes to our identity... we've never really thought of it that way before.

We may have figured that we're associated with Valleyview as a result of our own choice, and in terms of our shaping our identity - we're more likely to be here... because we've found Valleyview to be compatible with who we already are or what we want from a church – it affirms us, we like the music, the preaching lines up with how we see things, and so on...

We're here because we like this church and what goes on in it, and we like the people who go here as well, so we decided to

attend and be involved - at a certain level... for as long we feel comfortable with what's going on, for as long as the people here stay likeable... we'll keep associating.

We typically don't go choosing a church community because of how we anticipate changing our identity and how we will eventually see ourselves...

But, as we learned last week from John 15:16, Jesus reveals to us that we did not choose Him, He chose us! So, we might be thinking we chose to be here at Valleyview, and it might be for all the reasons we just listed – but the truth is that behind the scenes Jesus is using those things and working through those things to choose you – and here you are now as a part of Valleyview.

And we need to come to realize this brothers and sisters because continuing to think that we are here at Valleyview because of our own choice can be problematic.

I've been in the ministry long enough to know that everybody - everyone – eventually gets to a point, goes through a stage where they don't like what is going on in their church; or they may not like everyone who is there, or something in the ministry or teaching is challenging or uncomfortable, or maybe not challenging enough! So - what happens then?

Well, if we believe that our relationship with Christ and His Body – especially the local expression of His Body that you've connected with – in this case Valleyview, if that originates from our choice, then when things begin to get uncomfortable, when it begins to challenge how we see ourselves, our identity...**we** can choose to withdraw and leave.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not talking about situations when a church is going astray with false teaching, or abusive leadership, or the times where Christ chooses us and calls us to go and serve another Church somewhere else.

I'm talking about the general perception many people have that being part of Christ's church is simply a voluntary

association that we chose, which we can then chose to undo at any point and for whatever reason.

For example, we may choose to be involved in a church community so long as we have the extra time, if there are no other activities going on in our lives, or for when our kids are little and we want a bit of Sunday school exposure for them.

But when our career begins to take off... when we are able to afford to go away skiing every weekend, or when the kids start to play hockey...then we can choose to withdraw, because it was our choice to be here in the first place. But...

And that's how our scripture passage this morning starts off brothers and sisters, But - it says - *Y'all are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God!*

Brothers and sisters, if the Apostle Peter's description regarding a group of people who follow Jesus Christ is correct – and since scripture is infallible it is... then the truth of the matter is this - our connection to Jesus Christ and to his

church here at Valleyview, to repeat what we learned last week - was His choice for us!

He has chosen each of you – and others yet to come - to belong here so that being a part of this particular Church community. And, to build on what we learned last week, not only are we chosen to for a particular task of bearing fruit, making disciples, this choosing and subsequent belonging will have a **transformational** effect on our individual identities.

Vs. 10 says “*once you were not ‘a people’ BUT now you are ‘the people’ of God*”. So, the first transformation in our identity is that we go from seeing ourselves primarily as individuals, to primarily as part of a group, specifically a group of people belonging to God.

Additionally, our identity is transformed from being on the outside of God's group, not belonging - to being on the inside, being chosen to belong. We used to be excluded – now we are included, chosen by Jesus.

Brothers and sisters - together we form a group Jesus has personally selected – God wants you to be a part of what He is doing at Valleyview – *Y'all are a chosen **people – a group.***

Secondly belonging to God's people will change our identity from seeing ourselves as passive attendees, spectators, to **believing** we are active participants when we gather together – because as it says in vs. 9 we are *“a royal priesthood.”*
Now what does that mean?

Well, when we gather together as Jesus' followers, for worship, for prayer, for fellowship and encouragement, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, or whatever reason we are gathering together - we are more than a collection of individual followers – we are Christ's Body.

We are the Body of the one who fulfills the Covenant of Kingship made with King David, the one who is the true King of Israel forever, and the one who has been raised to heaven by God to be King of all Kings and Lord of Lords – Jesus is Royalty brothers and sisters – and so are we TOGETHER as His Body.

And, we are also the body of the one who scripture calls our Great High Priest, the one who mediates God's presence to man and man's presence to God – that's what Jesus does in His very being as God Incarnate in Man, and we are His Body.

So, brothers and sisters – the amazing truth about our identity is that as believers together, as the Body, we carry the divine authority of Christ the King, and we are a Priest who brings God's very presence into our surrounding community, this is what it means to be a Royal Priesthood.

So your individual act, your contribution to gathering together with the Body – your being here in Jesus name, radiates Jesus' spiritual authority into our neighborhood and it overrides and undercuts the authority of the enemy to keep the gospel from freeing the hearts and minds of people in our community.

Your act of gathering on Sunday to worship, of participating in the prayer ministry, of coming together for Men's group or Women's group, or bible study – whether your neighbors actually see it or know about it or not – it sends out a spiritual

signal identifying Jesus as King and the Holy Spirit uses that to release people from the authority of the Enemy and bring them to faith in Christ.

And you thought you were simply sitting through a Sunday service... brothers and sisters, you are not a church attendees – *y'all are a royal priesthood!*

And thirdly our identity is transformed from seeing ourselves as our culture sees churches – as nice people who are nice to other nice people, and who are supposed to be nice to them, accommodating and affirming when they want something from the church – that's who our culture thinks we are...

But we stop seeing ourselves like that - and we start seeing ourselves as a part of a **Holy Nation**. So what does that mean?

Well, perhaps you've heard of the "Leaf's Nation", or the "Rider Nation"? These are groups of sports fans who are totally committed to their sports teams, it's their identity and it is hard to miss it!

Their devotion and loyalty are incredible – they will go to extraordinary lengths to support their team and show their enthusiasm. Even when things are bad, even when things have been bad for years and years... they still believe their team could win the cup.

Brothers and sisters, Christ has chosen us to be a part of a **Holy Nation** – a group of people defined first and foremost by their loyalty to the One who is Holy – the one who is set apart from everything He created - God.

And because God is Holy, He commands us to be Holy, we should want to be Holy – To be set apart from other people for God's purposes. Brothers and sisters, can people tell you are part of the Holy Nation like they can tell someone from the Rider Nation? What are the markers that show holiness and do we see them as our identity?

Here's a few of them - We worship God through Jesus Christ on Sunday mornings, we are obedient to God's commands and laws – especially in sexual purity, honoring marriage, and

showing sacrificial love, so we help the poor and needy, and we give financially to Christ's Body to further His work, and it shows up especially in how we talk. For Matt 15:17 says *"what comes out of the mouth, comes out of the heart!"*

Now going into more detail on the marks of being holy, and especially what comes out of our mouths are sermons for another day. This is just to get you thinking about how being Holy is part of our identity together.

And perhaps the best way to make this a part of our identity is to remember what we were like without the light of Christ, what we were like when we were in darkness. That's another identity transformation in this passage, vs. 9 - God *"called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

By His grace and mercy, through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, accomplished in his sacrifice on the cross and in his victory over death – we identify with the light and turn away from the darkness - Amen!

And this is the ultimate mark of Holiness that sets us apart from other people – we've experienced that something not everyone else has - the grace and mercy and forgiveness of Christ – that sets us apart, so we are Holy, not perfect – just Holy – this is the core of our identity in Jesus Christ.

And what results from this is that we can't help but to praise Jesus Christ! And that's fun part, the motivation for getting together as the Holy Nation – to praise and worship Jesus!

So Brothers and sisters... who are you? In relation to God and His chosen people, we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation – I pray that you believe this deep in your soul, and... that you like who you are becoming because of it!

Because the end goal of who we are becoming as God's people, a royal priesthood and a holy nation is beautifully described in Eph 5:27. It says that Christ will *"present her – the church - to himself as a radiant church,(some translations say radiant bride) without stain or wrinkle or any other*

blemish, but holy and blameless.” That’s what we will become – that’s who we need to see ourselves as.

Brothers and sisters, we did not choose this for ourselves Christ chose it for us – remember that lest we become proud in who we are becoming, lest we think that we’ve earned it somehow by showing Holiness, we haven’t. It’s a gift of grace.

But... Christ’s choice for us is not fate. God’s actions require a response from us, and so Christ’s choice forces us to choose.

And that’s the last part of our identity – Are we obedient? Do we see ourselves as obedient - gathering to be part of God’s group, participating in worship and the work of the Church as a Royal Priesthood, embracing the light, showing the markings of a Holy Nation?

Brothers and sisters – you are here this morning so I believe your answer is Yes! In your spirit you want to be obedient to Christ, you are gathering as His Body, you are believing more and more that you are His Chosen people...

a Royal Priesthood and a Holy nation – I know its starting to become a part of your identity!

And my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use this message this morning to increase this belief even more... to make you believe it with ALL your heart soul mind and strength!

And... to give you the motivation, willingness and encouragement in the coming weeks and months ahead to act on it in obedience – especially when you’re tempted not to. Because that’s going to come...

And when it does your identity can help you make that decision to gather together for worship when you really want to sleep in or there’s other things that seem more important.

So your identity can motivate you to participate in the work of the body – standing up against the spiritual darkness and beating it back through singing out praise to King Jesus, manifesting the presence of God in this neighborhood being together in worship!

And so your identity can start to manifest your Holiness, not only by our actions together as a group... not only by our actions to each other when we are together – but in how we remain part of a Holy Nation when we are not together.

Because we are part of God’s group brothers and sisters, showing those marks of holiness when we are not together is just as important as when we are together.

If belonging to a Holy Nation is ingrained in our identity, then we don’t contradict it when we are apart – just as a Leaf’s fan wouldn’t wear a Habs jersey when they are home alone and no one is watching... its just who they are...

So, who are we brothers and sisters? We’re part of God’s group... a chosen people, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation. Believe it! Amen.