

Be What You Are!

Sermon Series on 1st Peter

1 Peter 1:1-16

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Easter 2 - April 8, 2018

Riverdale Baptist Church
Whitehorse, Yukon

Introduction

Let me repeat verse 3 . . . **he (God) has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** (1 Peter 1:3)

Last Sunday we witnessed a miracle. Did you know that?

It was Easter Sunday, the Sunday we commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In the historical account of the resurrection as told by Matthew, an eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus, he tells us that on the first Easter a violent earthquake occurred; the door to the tomb was rolled away and the tomb was empty!

The tremendous miraculous impact of that first resurrection was like a stone falling into a pond – the waves of power have spread from the first impact to effect people year after year, century after century and in every corner of the globe.

Last Sunday we witnessed the powerful wave of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as it changed the lives of our six baptized believers. Miracle!

The word Peter uses to describe this miracle is ‘new birth.’

Just as our first birth caused us to be identified by the blood, by the DNA and culture of our parents, grandparents and forbearers, so the resurrection of Jesus Christ has birthed believers in Jesus into a new identity.

Have you ever wanted a new identity?

Lots of people do. For one reason or another their current identity is being disrupted and they are looking for a new one, a **new birth!**

Carol and I have been talking a lot about this. As you know, for us, the time to retire has come and we have been wrestling with where this new journey will take us and how it may impact our identity.

Carol has been kidding me about this. She is such a loving and complementary partner to me. But as wife to a pastor there has been some long-suffering on her part. Even something as simple as no weekends. Pastors work on weekends. Like many of you they do not go out dancing on Saturday nights.

So, Carol has been telling me – I think kidding me – maybe in retirement we could move to one of those 55+ communities in Arizona and introduce ourselves as Tom (my legal name is Thomas) and Carrie (Tom & Carrie) and we could take up dancing on Saturday nights!

New identities! I told the congregational meeting on Tuesday that we are making plans to move to Haines Junction (a long ways from Arizona).

Most people who have visited Haines Junction remark about what a spectacular setting it would be to live in. But there is more to a community than geography, there are the people.

My daughter, who lives there was telling me, about half the community are members of Champagne & Aishihik First Nation; another group of Parks Canada employees and then all the old timers and assorted others.

So, I have been thinking; how are we going to fit in? How will we introduce ourselves?

I have been reading the recent major report of the Long Ago Person Found – the young man buried in the Haines Pass glacier some 200 years ago.

It has been a real eye opener as to how the entire enterprise surrounding this event has significantly contributed to the ongoing renewal of local First Nation heritage and culture.

Have you noticed how in public gatherings it is very common for a First Nation presenter to first identify themselves by clan, by tribe, by language and so on.

In the village of Haines Junction the expression of identity is quite important.

How will I introduce myself? Pastor Greg? Probably not. Tom? Probably not. Greg? Maybe

I happened to be thinking about this last Sunday and in light of Sunday's events and me showing up in a new community and having to identify myself; I was thinking, what I should do is go out and find a Cross with a symbol of the resurrected Jesus to wear around my neck – because I want everyone to know as they meet me the source from

which I want to live is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

We no longer live in my Grandfather's Canada where mainstream culture was Christian. I no longer assume people are Christian or have any idea about what Christian Faith actually is.

So, if this is my critical identity; how do I display and communicate it?

This is what Peter's first letter is about. The display in our world of Christian identity.

Text

A little bit about the background to Peter's letter to help us understand it better:

By all accounts Peter is writing his letter in Rome, sometime in the late 50's, early 60's. Important to his account is the historical evidence of the Roman Emperor Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome over the "Chrestus" controversy and in conjunction with his policy of colonization in the exact geographical areas mentioned by Peter.

There are solid reasons to understand Peter's audience are Christian believers, uprooted from their homes, the place of their natural identity, and sent to live in a far-off colony.

Peter's first words: **To God's elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces** (not Rome)

Then 1:17: . . . **live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.**

Finally 2:11: **Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles . . .**

So, on one hand these Christians are actual exiles and as such are living in an identity crisis

Perhaps our Syrian families experienced this – foreigners in a strange place – who am I?

At the same time, as we read through Peter's letter, he uses these exact circumstances to emphasize and remind them of their unique identity as Christians and calls them to take what is otherwise some significant suffering and turn it into a passage toward who they really are.

It sounds like a hard sell. However, Peter knows from the life of Jesus, from his own life, that suffering in this life is so often the passage through which the power of God forms his children

Peter twice uses this word – new birth or born again (new identity) – 1:3; 1:23 – twice. The unique word Peter uses appears only here in the Bible. Although it is close to what Jesus uses when he tells Nicodemus he must be born again. Peter roots being born again in two sources:

the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – the historical earthquake!

and, in 1:23, through the living and enduring word of God – the inspired pages of sacred Scripture as they are read, explained and lived out by God's people.

We Christians, to whom Peter writes were not present at the resurrection, but the word of God coming to us through the servants of God like Peter, conveys this power of God right into our hearts.

The six people baptized last Sunday witness to this.

Peter talks about the new birth (new identity) from these two perspectives:

First, the direct, effective but hidden work of God. On Easter morning the tomb was empty, no one saw the miraculous moment when Christ arose. But they saw the after effects, they saw Jesus Christ alive again.

Likewise with the new birth:

Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God – verse 2 – could it be otherwise? The new birth, the new identity, is not haphazard, it is in the planned decision of God.

The salvation of our souls when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming – verse 9 – from before time to the end of time. God is at work in the lives of his children.

Gifting an inheritance and through faith shielding his people with power – verse 4 & 5

In his great mercy (the Old Testament 'hesed') he has given new birth – verse 3 – mercy, not merit. We saw the believers being baptized last week but we did not see the direct, effective and hidden work of God in their souls.

The direct and effective action of God to form a people through Jesus Christ is not about selecting some to be in heaven and some to be in hell – No! – it is so all people can witness the nature of God as they observe Christians (children) living day by day around them.

The new birth is also rooted in the living and enduring word of God. As I said, we Christians, to whom Peter writes, were not present at the resurrection, but the word of God, which comes to us through the servants of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit, conveys this power of God right into our hearts.

In the testimonies of the six baptized believers we read of this. God spoke through his people, his children, as they surrounded these six persons, and new birth came.

Peter does as Jesus did before him – taking Old Testament terminology identifying God's chosen people and applies it to the followers of Jesus.

The exile and foreigner terms were used initially by Abraham – Genesis 23:4 – **I am a foreigner and stranger among you.** Hebrews 11 refers to Abraham and all the faith walkers after him as foreigners and strangers on earth.

Furthermore, when Peter uses the idea of being a chosen people through obedience and sprinkled blood (verse 2) he applies to Christians what first appeared in Exodus 24 when God made a covenant with Moses and the children of Israel at Mount Sinai.

Finally, the claim, shared by Jesus, that the Old Testament prophets, who were the conveyers of the word of God, spoke not just about their own times but even more so were speaking about God's people as found in Jesus Christ.

So, Peter claims the new birth, the new identity, through Jesus brings us solidly into the family of God's people. The place where the Word of God dwells.

This is an existential, an experiential reality whereby the new birth in an individual is manifested through new connections and relations with the people of God.

Do not think this language of being a chosen person means you are somehow more special than others – No! – rather chosen for a task, an identity in life – to display the life of God along with the children of God!

Application

Our challenge? Be What You Are!

Verse 13 - 16: **Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. . . . As obedient children do not conform . . . but be holy in all you do.**

Our Christian identity, rooted in the all-powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, comes to us through the living and enduring word of God as conveyed by the people of God.

First through the prophets and apostles who were inspired to write Holy Scripture and second through the living and universal Christian Church wherein we hear, are taught, understand, and helped to put into practice the life and way of God's word.

This is Christian identity.

We are surrounded, as foreigners, with many powers seeking to identify us:

Our natural heritage coming through our family

Our vocations

Our recreations

Our politics

Our economics

None of this compares with being a child of God, a part of the people of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With the task of being holy – not holier than thou – but set apart – living close to God – so that the nature of the living God can be displayed.

May we encourage one another to live into what we are. Amen.