

**Wednesday, February 28, 2018 – Lent Midweek III**  
**“Peculiar”**

1 Peter 2: 9-10

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*Calling Us Home – CSL Series*  
Definition Structure

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

Did that Bible passage sound a little strange? “Ye” instead of “you” and “hath” instead of “has?” I read tonight’s sermon text from the King James translation of the Bible. Some of you grew up with the King James translation. In fact, some churches still today use only the King James translation, even though it’s really, really old. It goes way back to the year 1611. Over the course of time, some words change their meanings. So today we say “you” instead of “ye” and we say “has” instead of “hath.” In this passage St. Peter uses a word about you that has changed its meaning. He says you are “a peculiar people.” You always thought that other guy in church was peculiar, didn’t you? Maybe he or she thinks the same thing about you! Well, when we go home tonight, I hope we’ll all think that we’re pretty peculiar. This is important because God is calling us to himself and he calls us with what? God calls us with words. Paying attention to words, even old, strange words can help us draw closer to God and God closer to us. So here’s what I’m offering you this evening. Let’s look at some old words, see what they really mean, and God’s Spirit will lead us to see why we really are peculiar people.

Today the word “peculiar” means you’re strange, weird, eccentric, that you don’t really fit in. But “peculiar” has another meaning, an older meaning. You are “peculiar” when you belong exclusively to some person or group. That’s the meaning here, not that we Christians are weird but that we belong, belong to the God and belong to one other. A newer translation, the English Standard Version, puts tonight’s Bible passage this way: “But you are a chosen race, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” In the truest sense of the word, you and I are peculiar, peculiar to God. We are his possession. What is it about the Good News of Jesus Christ that makes us God’s peculiar people?

Two additional old words tell us why we are peculiar to God. Peter says that Christians, “in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” There are two old words there, “people” and “mercy.” The first we’ll consider is “mercy.”

Today the word “mercy” means a feeling of pity or compassion that we have when we see someone worse off than we are. It’s a feeling in here, in your heart. You see a homeless person, you see a report about the victims of hurricanes or wildfires or crime, you hear of a young child who is dying of cancer, and you feel it in here, in your heart. Nothing wrong with that. In fact, if you’re not moved to pity or compassion, there is something wrong with you. But “mercy” has a different meaning in the Bible, an older meaning that can open our ears to how good God really is. “Mercy” in the Bible is more than a feeling. Mercy in the Bible is acts, concrete, hands-on acts of loving kindness that people do for each other when they are in a relationship. So when the Bible talks about God’s mercy, it doesn’t simply mean that God looks down from heaven and feels sorry for us poor, miserable sinners. It means that God does things to help us; God acts. That’s why you’ll often find “mercy” in the plural. The Bible likes to talk about the “mercies” of God. New translations call it the “loving kindnesses” of God. God entered into a relationship with you when you were baptized. Ever since then, he’s been doing mercies for you, doing specific acts of loving kindness. Of course the chief mercy is the forgiveness of sins but his mercies are so much more. The health he gives you to work, the family that surrounds and supports you, the safety we have in our society, communion, this sermon . . . These are specific, hands-on things that God does for us. It’s a spiritually dangerous thing to think that Lent is only about the suffering of Jesus. In fact, the devil will tempt you to think Lent is only about what happened so long ago. The truth is that you are baptized in Jesus’ death and resurrection and God is helping us on our way home with mercies. These loving-kindnesses from God do make us peculiar, God’s peculiar people. The word “people” is another word that has a different meaning in the Bible. Peter says Christians, “in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” What does the word “people” mean today?

Generally it means a group of individuals. You see people down on the Strip, people commuting to work, people going to vote. But the word “people” in the Bible is loaded with much more meaning than that. Because God gives you mercies, you are God’s people. God’s people in the Bible are people who are set apart from the general run of people. You’re not normal! You’re peculiar people. As we talked about last Wednesday, we are a “holy” people, people who

call the holy God our Father. Thinking about this, that you are holy, that you receive mercies, gives you a real sense of belonging. Again, it goes back to your baptism. Our life together as a congregation is a demonstration that we are “God’s people” amidst all the other people of this world. We belong to God and we belong to each other. Yes, indeed. The people who come to this church really are “peculiar!”

What I pray happens through this sermon is a sense of how special you and I are. Peter describes how special we are by using some other words that aren’t the way we usually think of ourselves. He uses some more words that aren’t in our daily vocabulary. He says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” First, you and I are a “chosen generation.” One modern translation puts it this way: “You are God’s chosen and special people” (Contemporary English Version). Then the King James translation says that we are “a royal priesthood.” We don’t think of ourselves as royalty, and no one else does either. “Who do you think you are, the king of England?” And we don’t think of ourselves as “priests.” But together we are a priesthood. Together we go to God. Together God comes to us. It doesn’t depend upon some person, some priest or pastor serving as the middleman. Indeed, there is only one middleman between us and God, Jesus Christ. The Bible calls Jesus our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). By the way, those of you who think I’m a kind of good luck charm to get you closer to God or that my prayers count for more than yours, the job of a pastor is to get out himself of the way and do all he can to point the congregation to the Good News of God in Jesus. Third, Peter describes us as a “holy nation.” Today the word “nation” makes us think of the United States or Canada or Mexico. Our “holy nation,” the church, is found in all the earthly “nations” of this world. As the book of Revelation describes us, we are “a great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9). “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.”

Wrapping this up, God has a purpose in making us His peculiar people and the purpose is this: “that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” In the passion reading that we heard earlier, Jesus prepared for His suffering by praying in Gethsemane but His disciples didn’t act like God’s “peculiar” people. They slept while Jesus prayed and they fled when Jesus was betrayed. Sadly, they acted like

normal people, but a few days later those disciples got it; they became “peculiar” people who turned the world upside down. Jesus’ resurrection sent them into the world with a message to share. When you leave church this evening, when you go to school or work tomorrow morning, when you do whatever it is you do out there in the workaday world, remember that you go to “show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” What will that get us? Some people will think that we followers of Jesus are strange, that we are out-of-step with our culture. In fact, some people might say that we are peculiar. In fact, we are. In Jesus’ name, Amen.