

We are starting a new series that continues a focus we started last year on our ten-year vision as a church. Someone has said vision is "hope with a blueprint." The Bible says, "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). We all need to have a vision of where we are going and how we are going to get there. About a year ago, our elders sensed God was putting a new vision for our church on our hearts.

Why do we have a new vision? It's not that we felt we were off track. It's not that we're changing our mission or core values. Our mission is still to make and mature more followers of Christ. Our core values are still the centrality of God's word, worship, community, grace, evangelism, and the leadership of elders. Our new vision is simply a way to provide focus and invest our resources for the next ten years.

The most important thing is the why. Our vision emerged out of a tremendous need. We live in one of the most spiritually barren places in America. We looked at a recent study of our area, and it indicated that twenty-six percent of the people who live in a ten-mile radius of us when asked about religious affiliation, checked the box labeled "none." Only one percent described themselves as "committed to faith," meaning faith satisfies their desires, and they go to church regularly. This is compared to the national average that said almost ten percent describe themselves as "committed to faith." We live in a region where the vast majority has a misguided worldview that results in an unfulfilling life of materialism, isolation, and transience, as well as an inaccurate view of what it really means to follow Jesus.

Out of this need has emerged our vision. This is our mission field. Jesus loves this place and the people who live here. He's called us, his church, to be right here! But if we are going to bring transformation, we have to be transformed. At its simplest, our vision is to be transformed people who are transforming the Peninsula.

To accomplish this, we've created four pillars. These pillars are strategic focuses for us. Two of the pillars, worship, and spiritual formation, are centered on allowing God to transform us. Worship is our God-glorifying response to who God is and what he has done. Spiritual formation is intentionally opening our lives to the work of the Spirit, so we become more like Christ. We focused on those two pillars last year. Hopefully, we're continuing to engage at a deep level in both.

This year we're focusing on the two other pillars, equipping and cultural engagement. These are centered on us being agents of

transformation to those around us. We are starting a six-week series on the equipping pillar titled, "Making a Move." This pillar is all about preparing each of us to make a strategic move to better serve both inside and outside the walls of the church. We want to create a culture within CPC that enables each of us to identify and use our gifts and to fulfill our calling. And here's the truth I want you to consider this morning: God has called you to the ministry no matter who you are.

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2: 9-10**

If someone were to ask you what you thought were the greatest threats to your Christian experience, what would you answer? If someone were to ask what you thought was the greatest danger to Christianity, what would be your answer?

I think we can all come up with our own list of threats. I think most of us look toward attacks coming from outside the church. Some of you may say, it's the rise of functional atheism in America, where more and more people around us are convinced there is no reason to believe in God.

Some of us may say the greatest threat is the gross materialism of our culture that says life is about physical things and physical experiences. Some of us may say the biggest threat is the rampant immorality of our culture that says anything seems to be okay anymore.

But I would argue what is going on out there has always been going on out there for the church around the world. Peter wrote his letter to a group of struggling Christians who had recently converted out of Judaism and accepted Jesus Christ as their messiah. And this little band, in their desire to follow Christ, had become a persecuted minority.

Peter's audience was being attacked. Attacked by forces from outside their church. But Peter didn't say to them, "Circle the Wagons! Separate yourselves! Go into hiding!" Instead, he said in chapter 2, verses 9-10, "Remember who you are!"

And Peter, the pastor, wrote a letter to encourage them. Peter wanted to dispel the notion that the greatest danger was outside the church. Instead, he wanted them to know that the greatest

danger to the church comes from within our own hearts when we forget who we are.

When you are facing pressure, don't forget who you are. We are a people called to a collective faith, a faith that is about relationships. The Apostle Paul uses terms like body, temple, and family to remind us that we are not hardwired to do this thing on our own. Our health, our growth, our usefulness for ministry is based on us not just understanding that, but also living it out in the collective.

Whether we recognize it or not, whether we are living like it right now or not, each of us is by grace, by divine purpose, intimately connected to everyone in this room. We are not just individuals here to consume and go back to a private life.

So here, Peter answers the question, "What is our new identity?" You want to stand strong, prevail, make a difference, first thing is this: "Remember! Don't forget! Embrace your connectedness to your brothers and sisters in Christ!" Because when we remember our identity, we will then find our calling.

## **What is Our New Identity?**

### **Chosen People**

Remember, God chose you! Not because of your own ability, quite apart from your own achievement, you have been chosen by the grace of God to be part of a new spiritual people with God as our Father. These new spiritual people are defined by what is in their hearts. It's not a biological lineage or DNA, but a spiritual lineage.

Peter's audience would understand their history. God chose their ancestors, not because they were exceptional in any way. They were nothing special. God chose their ancestors simply because God loved them. And he wanted to use His people to declare and reveal the coming messiah, the one who comes to save to the world. And Peter said, "Now, This is us!" We are nothing special. But God loves us and has chosen us for the special work to glorify God and make His Son Jesus known to all people. When we remember who we are, we will get the call.

### **Royal Priesthood**

Peter said that they were called to be priests to the King, in service to the King. But what does the role of priest reveal? A priest has direct access to God, offers spiritual sacrifices to God, works, serves, helps people draw close to God, and be reconciled to God. A priest intercedes and mediates. A priest opens up access for people, for every nation and tribe to come to God. Hold that thought; we will come back to Peter's declaration that we are a royal priesthood.

### **Holy Nation**

So not only are we chosen, not only are we royal, but we are also holy. We have been set apart by God to be His special people, and

Peter is arguing that this identity is deeper than race, it's deeper than gender, it's deeper than national or political interests, it's deeper than language, it's deeper than ethnicity, it's deeper than culture, it's deeper than socio-economic class. The normal divisions that separate people no longer divide us. Our new collective identity levels the playing field and makes us all the same, deeply loved, and deeply valued by Christ.

I want all of us to think about what Peter is reminding us when we question in this series whether we are truly useful to God. Here is more encouragement.

### **God's Special Possession**

It's hard to capture in a few moments the power of these words. God has initiated and reached out to you and taken you as His own and drawn you to his heart. He has wrapped his arms around you and said, "Your mine and you are valuable to me!"

God says, "You may never experience human success, but you're mine, and you are valuable to me!" God says, "You may be living in a body that is broken or failing, but you're mine, and you are valuable to me!" To others, he says, "You may not be surrounded by an affirming group of friends, but you're mine, and you are valuable to me!"

When you are facing the unexpected, when you are facing adversity, when you are wondering if you are worth anything to God, when you think you have nothing to offer to God, this is the identity you need to preach to yourself. "I'm born again. I'm set apart as a member of the royal priesthood. I'm a citizen of that holy nation. I am God's special possession!"

So as we begin this series on getting equipped, it's right for us to start with remembering our identity. Because if we understand our identity, then we will get our calling. And that is what is next.

### **What is Our New Calling?**

*"... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2: 9b).* There is no better purpose statement that a follower of Christ can claim. My new identity drives a new ultimate purpose of my being. This is my reason to live. So, I need to get equipped to fulfill my calling. I've been called out of darkness and into the light not to proclaim a theology, or proclaim the glory of a particular church on the corner, or proclaim programs or strategies. I'm called to point again and again both inside these walls and outside these walls to the glory of the person - Jesus Christ, who is our Savior.

Peter is saying to get equipped. The way you declare the praises or point out his excellences, or his goodness is to tell your story. Tell your story anytime you can of how this Redeemer called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Tell them that in his sovereignty, he has led your story. In his power, he has helped you to see, even though you were blind. Tell that in his grace, he made you aware of your need and sin.

Tell of his mercy; he forgave you. In his power, he now protects and delivers you. Tell it all. The 24 elders in Revelation sang a new song.

**And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Revelation 5:9-10**

I love what these elders tell us. We are not only part of a kingdom and part of the Royal Priesthood; we are individually given the title of priest. And we are to serve God as priests.

I would imagine that for some of us to consider that we are a priest is a shocker. I mean, I wouldn't recommend you go into your next business meeting and say, "Hi, I'm Doug, and my specialty is IT, but I'm also a priest."

We have some things we must learn in our new series. It's interesting to see how traditions and the institution of church have changed the intended meanings of words. And really have drifted from the New Testament.

Our staff has been going through a book called Unfinished Business – Returning the Ministry to the People of God, by Greg Ogden. Norma on our staff put together this summary for us, and I wanted to share it with you.

**Priest:** Common usage - a priest is qualified to act as a mediator between God and man. Set apart by taking vows. The Old Testament tells us that priests were set apart as an exclusive group. They had to be descendants of Aaron from the trip of Levi. In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is the only high priest. The entire body of believers is a priesthood, and they are given authority and access. The office of priest is eliminated as a special group.

**Saint:** Common usage is that a saint is an exclusive group where members of the group are characterized by exceptional personal holiness and/or sacrifice. But the New Testament uses saint to refer to all Christ-followers, which includes ordinary Christians.

**Minister:** Those set apart into a higher class of Christian, and often would be a class of the ordained. The New Testament never used minister to refer to a group of people. The Greek word for minister is diakonia, which is a term used to describe acts of service and/or the servant heart attitude.

**Clergy:** Well, the church whiffed on this one. Common usage of this term is an exclusive leadership group, those who supervise the laity. The New Testament never used clergy to refer to a group of people. The Greek word for clergy is *kleros*, which means inheritance or lot. The inheritance all the saints receive in Christ.

**Laity:** Again, common usage defines what we are not. We are not clergy. It has a less than connotation. But laity in the New

Testament comes from the Greek word *laos*, which means "called out" or "special people."

It's time for us break down the traditional distinctions. And I say this knowing that I have been the beneficiary of some clergy perks, which I have enjoyed over the years. I remember I used to play golf at a course where the pro went to my church and gave Monday morning clergy discounts. I have enjoyed preferred parking at hospitals when I would go visit a person in my church. When I went for coffee at the Men's Retreat early in the morning, someone would usually buy my coffee. It was awesome.

People often ask me if I would like to be called Pastor Dan or Reverend Reid. And I would say, "When I am out in public please just call me Dan." But to get a reaction, I would say, "But in my home I want my family to call me Reverend."

One time, I opened a piece of mail from another pastor from a denomination I wasn't familiar with. And he signed his letter from the Very Reverend, Bob Smith. At an elder meeting, I showed that letter to my elders, and I told them, "Hey look at this letter, I don't think you are showing me enough respect." My elders called me a few other names that I won't repeat here this morning.

So, to get equipped, we need to remember our identity, break down the traditional barriers, and then discover our calling. What does it mean that all of us? All of us have direct access to the very presence of God.

**Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.... Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14,16**

For thousands of years, the people of God were not able to enter the presence of God. It was shut off to them. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place and be where the glory of God was revealed. Matthew tells us that when Jesus was crucified, the veil in the temple in Jerusalem that separated the people from the holy place was torn in two. Now Every believer, through faith in Christ, can approach God directly in prayer and worship and find grace.

We don't need an appointed person to go there for us. We don't need an appointed person to dispense God's grace to us. Jesus is now our High Priest. He intercedes for us. His shed blood on the cross covers our sins. His death purchased our access to God directly. And God says to all of us here. "Come, call me your Father. Bring your needs to me, and know that I will never turn you away." No matter what happens on earth, our promise is that we will never be alone. God is with us. *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).*

## All of Us Offer Spiritual Sacrifices to God

Not only do we have direct access, and that should change our lives. We also are called as priests to offer spiritual sacrifices. As priests made sacrifices in the Old Testament, so we are called to a life of sacrifice. Every one of us is called to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light. So being called to the ministry means that we are called to live a priestly life, a life of sacrifice, a life willing to offer up our spiritual gifts, our talents, our possessions, our education, our energy, and our resources, our relationships, our circumstances for the service of the God who is our king.

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Romans 12:1**

## All Our Work is Priestly Work

Here is another thought. A common theme of the definitions of priest, saint, minister, and laity means that no matter who we are and no matter how ordinary our work seems to us, it is priestly work. "The word priest should become as common as the word "Christian" because all Christians are priests" (Martin Luther).

There is no hierarchy. A Christian who serves on staff using his or her gifts primarily inside the church is a priest. Just as a Christian at a tech company may use his or her talents and gifts to serve God outside the church is a priest. Both are equal callings in the eyes of God. Both are equally doing priestly work to serve the king.

What may need to change in you to view your vocation the way God views your vocation? As Paul says in Colossians 3:23, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working to the Lord, not for human masters.*"

## All of Us are Agents of Reconciliation

When we understand our new identity, we will get our calling. Be empowered by your new understanding of your identity and read this high calling to all Christians. "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

A priest brings people to God and brings God to the people. We represent God. God has extended the call to all of us to take the message, and we carry that message of Christ's love and grace to

people in dark and troubled places. An ambassador carries the message of His Leader. An ambassador represents his leader. And this takes courage. And our courage comes when we embrace our new identity.

## Remember your identity, and receive your calling.

This past weekend, I was with about 140 guys at our CPC Men's Retreat at Mt. Hermon. I have heard many positive comments. "Oh, that was the best retreat Men's Retreat ever." or "I had a great time. Thank your team for us." So, I found myself asking, "What made this retreat so special?" I mean year after year they become kind of a blur to me. The guys thought about my question, and I got various answers, but there was a common thread that became an "aha" moment for me. I counted the guys who had official roles in helping make this retreat happen, and there were over 40 guys involved in various work contributing throughout the weekend. And as I studied this passage, it hit me. Over 40 guys did priestly work. The guys went from observing to participating.

If you study Old Testament worship, the Levitical Priests did the work while the people observed. But with worship in the New Covenant through Jesus, our call is to move from observant to participant. And when God's people participate, whether it be at a Men's Retreat or in this auditorium, it makes all the difference. We are getting it right.

We have 900 priests of God in this auditorium every Sunday. Imagine us all fulfilling our priestly duties inside this church and outside these walls. Priest praising God with our lips, sharing our gratitude, serving, giving, and then leaving this place doing our priestly duties through acts of kindness, hospitality, and telling God's story with our lives. That's what we are getting equipped to do.

On Sunday mornings and at Men's Retreats, we gather for worship as priests. We know our identity now. But outside these walls, we are unrecognized royalty. Your neighbors would never suspect you are a royal. Your teammates at work would never imagine that your lineage goes back to a great king. But we know the truth, and that is what matters. Peter calls us a royal priesthood. John calls us a kingdom of priests. And those are the voices that matter. Our surroundings will likely still stay the same, but we are different. And that is what matters.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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