

1 Peter 2:9-12

Epiphany 5, Supplement Series A, February 5, 2017

Theme: You are strange!

I. You proclaim God's praises

II. You live an honorable life

INJ When you are a tourist, you stick out. If you head South for warm weather, your winter skin looks like you haven't seen the sun for decades. You wear Michigan clothes. You sound strange with your accent. You don't know the local customs— and you don't care to know them, because you won't be there long. You are a tourist, and tourists are strange.

We see it from the other point of view, too. Tourism is important to Michigan and our area. But you can spot them. They are different from people who have their homes and businesses and families in this area. It isn't bad, but they are strangers. Sometimes you notice a southern drawl, or they use different figures of speech. Their clothing might tell you they are from a different country or culture, or from a different state.

You can't help but look, right? The clothing is magnificent. The speech patterns are intriguing. The things they do are interesting. You watch how they behave. Tourists are strange, aren't they?

In our lesson today, Peter calls us strange. " Aliens and temporary residents [strangers] in the world." In other words, we aren't from around here, and we aren't staying long. We don't intend to put down roots and blend in because we don't belong in this sinful world with its dark depravity and disobedience to God. God has made us his children, heirs of heaven. We are strangers, merely tourists in this world.

Most of the time, we hate the idea of sticking out, being strange. We take comfort in being just like everyone else. We try to blend in, buying things that are trending now. We identify with posts that have millions of likes or shares. Instead of going against the grain, we fit in.

When you stand out, it brings unwanted attention. Someone will comment, noticing how strange you are. A strange person causes conversation to be uncomfortable. Yet what Paul says is good. Jesus makes you different from the sinful world. He " called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." You are strange, because you proclaim God's praises and you live an honorable life. Strange!

I should describe in what way we are strange. Peter says that the world is only darkness. It is corrupt and rebellious. It hates the God who made it and seeks to undermine his authority and his care. How dare he

call the things they like, sinful? Everyone is doing it! It's fun! The world is out of phase: what is upright and good is called ugly and hateful, while what is rotten and divisive is held out as enlightened wisdom.

You are strange to that way of thinking. You don't belong to that way of life. You cannot find a home and be comfortable where God is reviled and where the Savior is hated. Fitting in with the darkness means death to the Christian faith God has given you. You are strange because he " called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The marvelous light is God's gift of faith. You know that sin is real, and you confess that you are also guilty of it. Light exposes your need for forgiveness. Light reveals that Jesus is your Savior. Standing firmly in the light, his words declare you holy. Jesus' blood cleanses you. It isn't strange to you, but like a tourist, you stick out, because you proclaim God's praises.

When you talk about important things, you don't just talk about yourself and what you like. You say what God has done for you. He sent his Son to substitute for sinners. He comes in power through the gospel in word and sacraments. His mercy and his grace are worthy of attention. Don't look at me, look at Jesus. Proclaiming the praises of God's amazing mercy makes you strange.

Strange can lead us to feel unwanted. Popular people parade their depravity and congratulate themselves in it, and we are treated like yesterday's garbage. The inclination of our own hearts craves the attention of the darkness. Do they have value despite their offending our God? Does something worthwhile lurk in all the crud? Eve thought that eating the forbidden fruit would give her wisdom, but giving in only brought death. The value of the world's glam and glitter is nothing. It is worthless. The world cannot give peace or joy or lasting glory. Don't look for what makes you valuable in the emptiness of this world.

You are a stranger here. You don't have permanent status, but you are a tourist. Your value comes from the amazing titles God gives you. He says you are " a royal priesthood" and " a holy nation." The King of heaven and earth wants you! You have access to him and you daily enter his presence. You have been declared holy by the blood of Jesus and you are loved by him. If you want value, there it is! God has given you priceless worth in Christ. You can't help but proclaim God's praises. It is strange, I suppose, to those who might be watching. But can you really keep what God has done for you inside?

Belonging is one of the things we desire in life. Where are we

comfortable? With whom do we fit? What makes us feel safe and secure and wanted and complete? We pursue what might meet our need for belonging: Work. Entertainment. Alcohol. Family. Money. Favorable weather. Risky behavior. Think about how those things become our gods, our idols. We don't belong with them! They are not truly fulfilling and they do not have lasting meaning.

But God has called you to be his own. He says you belong with him. He put his name on you in Baptism and he remains close to you by his words and promises. Don't you belong where God assures you of forgiveness? Don't you belong where he pours out his Holy Spirit in the gospel? Don't you belong with the people who confess the same truths and rejoice in the same gospel? As you proclaim God's praises, you are strange to the world, but you belong in Christ. You belong here.

Look at the paths that lie before you. You can make friends with the world and live in darkness, unbelief, frustration and the emptiness that leads only to death. Go ahead and put down roots and make this place your home! But then you are no longer a tourist. You cease being strange and you stop belonging to Christ.

Listen to God, who calls you strange. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and temporary residents in the world, to abstain from the desires of the flesh, which war against your soul."

You are strange because of what God has done for you. Your Christian faith shows itself in how you talk about God and how you measure your value and belonging – you proclaim God's praises. You are also strange in the way you choose to live your life. In the Gospel today Jesus called you salt and light. You are people who stand out. Those still in darkness may see and wonder why you are so strange. They watch when you don't follow into depravity. You won't agree to their practices and perspective. You are strange because you live an honorable life.

The temptation to a dishonorable life doesn't start in the dark world around us, but it comes from our own hearts. The lust and the greed and the selfishness and the hate are no strangers to us. But remember what God has called you. Holy. Belonging to him. Chosen. His

people. Forgiven. The determination and the desire to live an honorable life comes from God himself through his word. It is God's gift to you by his gospel. Jesus is the one who called you away from the darkness to his marvelous light. He leads you also to abstain from that worthless way of life that wars against your soul. You are only a temporary resident here, a tourist. Stay close to Jesus and his words and live like his dear child.

The opposition doesn't take your witness silently. It howls and whines. It attacks and slanders. There is no shortage of evidence that a life that honors God our creator and praises Jesus the Savior is despised by many. Don't let them separate you from the promises of your God. Though they rampage against you, you stand strong by standing in God's promises. You have been shown mercy by the Almighty God! They cannot prevail against him.

When it gets bad (and it does!) then keep in focus the home God has prepared for you in heaven. This strange situation where you don't fit in will not last. Jesus will come again. Keep hearing and learning God's words. Read your Bible at home. Treasure Christian education in Sunday School and at our Lutheran Elementary School. Isn't it strange that you value these things that the world dismisses? You even give significant time and money so that your church can provide you with the pure gospel?

Yes, you are strange. Perhaps some in this dark world will see you and be curious. They are watching, and salt and light do have an effect on their surroundings! Perhaps some who see your way of life and who hear your witness will glorify God when he comes. Won't that be amazing!

Meanwhile, stand firm in God's promises to you. You belong to him and it shows in your honorable life. And when you make less than honorable choices? When you are hard pressed in the war against your soul? Repent. Jesus died to win your forgiveness. Turn away from the sin! Rejoice in the Savior. You have peace with God. This strange pattern binds you to Jesus who has risen from the dead. Proclaim his praises! You have a family of believers to encourage you as you live an honorable life. You are not alone. You may be a tourist now, but home is near!

So I say the same thing Joshua said in our First Lesson: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!" As for you, what will you do? Don't blend in and get lost in the darkness. You are strangers here, temporary residents, tourists. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." SDG Amen.