

## **God's Instruments**

Trinity CRC, Edmonton, July 8, 2018AM  
Summer 2018

**1 Peter 2:1-12 (v.9)**

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Beloved friends in Christ,

When I was in Thailand, no matter where you travel, you will see a large picture or a beautiful statue of the king of that country. His face is everywhere. In the Bangkok Hospital foyer, there is a gold-plated statue and, not everyone, but many people will stop briefly as they walk by it and give a quick bow to the king.

The current king has only been ruling for about a year. His father ruled Thailand graciously for several decades and was well loved by the people. When he died, the country had a year of mourning. Thai people were expected to wear some black for a whole year to commemorate his death and grieve their loss. And more pictures of him than ever were found throughout the land.

"In ancient days," writes Dustin Smith, "kings would put a statue in every corner of the empire to let people know whose kingdom it was. When you saw this statue, it was a constant reminder of who was ultimately in charge." So you should be aware of that. On our first trip to Thailand two years ago, we were told very clearly by our daughter Rachel not to ever make fun of the king. I'm not sure why, but she made a special point to tell me that several times. You are best off never to mention his name in case someone of authority hears that you disrespected the king or someone else simply reports you the authorities. That is not tolerated. The king must be honoured and respected. This country is his and you don't want to forget that.

It reminds me a little of Isaiah 6 where the prophet sees God on his throne with angels around singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" God in all of his majesty is worthy of our highest honour. We identify holiness with his heavenly majesty. And rightly so.

### **Called by A Holy God**

But in 1 Peter 2, God's people are called holy. And that's in part because we are made in God's image. Like that ancient statue, God places us in every part of his world to say, "This person is mine. She's my girl. He belongs to me. And if I'm holy, my children are too." It's truly amazing that this holy God calls us to himself!

We don't have to look at ourselves too long to realize that we are not anywhere near the kind of holy that God is. We look at our lives and we're quick to side with Isaiah who saw our holy God and said, "Woe is me! I'm a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips."

I don't know if any of us recognizes how sinful we are. Do we? I certainly don't. But one look at Jesus—a real honest look—can put things in perspective. And, of course, we can't see him in the flesh. Even if we could, we probably still wouldn't see how great he is any quicker or better than his disciples did when they were with him in the flesh for three years.

I am thankful for what the Lord in his mercy has been teaching me through the ordeal we've gone through with our daughter in the past four months. All I could do in those first days of seeing Rachel in a coma was cry out to God. We poured out our hearts and our tears over her bed. Then we sat and prayed some more, read scripture and listened to Christian music to strengthen our spirits.

I spent so much sweet time with Jesus. It was in those times that I listened to one song—and I tried to find it back but failed. That song had a video with it that reminded me of watching "The Passion of the Christ" a decade ago or so. I hate watching that because it's gruesome, even though it is very historically accurate. When I watched an actor being portrayed as Jesus, being beaten with fists, whipped with a leather strap, and then being flogged with sharpened edges which—in real life—would have ripped through Jesus' skin, I cried and cried. I know it wasn't real for the actor, but it reminded me how much my sin cost our Lord Jesus. And the physical torment he endured for my sin was only a fraction of the suffering he endured to save me. And to save you. He bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world. I have no clue how that all worked out on the balance scales of God's justice but it did.

We all need to pause periodically to realize again the depths of Christ's love for us! That's one of the reasons it's important to pause in personal devotions time and to come to public worship regularly. We need to be reminded of what Jesus has done for us because we so quickly take it for granted. We even take our sin lightly. We need reminders from Scripture, through worship, from singing and sermons to reorient our lives again. Otherwise we will wander. We will forget that we are set apart, holy, devoted to the Lord's service. We are called by a holy God and made holy through Christ alone.

It is through Christ's death and resurrection for us that we are made righteous. And through his righteousness he also restores the image of God in us broken by sin. Moreover, in Christ, we are set apart for God's service in this world. In that way we are declared holy. God calls us his holy people.

You see, more than *holy* having something to do with majesty, it means *set apart*. So when we are called a holy people, God is saying, I took you out of sin, chose you, redeemed you, and gave you a new position in this world. I don't call you holy so that people will stand in awe of you, put up posters or statues of you, as if you were a king or a Hollywood star. Being God's children means we are set apart for his purposes. Our text in 1 Peter 2:9 says,

*1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

So we need reminders that we are holy! Not better than anyone else but chosen by our holy and majestic God, our precious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We're set apart by him to be his instruments in this world. Yes, we are not our own. We don't call the shots for our life. We realize that God holds us securely in his eternal care and he is good. So as he calls us, we offer our lives to his holy service.

## **Called to Holy Service**

We are called to his service as lights in the dark world, says Peter. In other words, God placed you in position on the earth, so you could reflect his holiness and brilliance. I like how Isaiah 61:3 says that you and I will be "a display of his splendor." That's what happens when we image God as his instruments of holiness in this world.

In particular, when Peter calls us a priesthood of God, he's reminding us of our calling to be concerned for others and not so focused on ourselves. In the words we used two weeks ago when we looked at the call of Abram, we remember that we are blessed to be a blessing. That gives us true purpose in life, eternal purpose.

That's our calling as royal priests today. We serve our neighbours in the name of Jesus. Through Christ, we are redeemed to be a blessing to the world. Now it's just a matter of keeping our eyes open.

Look for what God puts in your path. In the rush of life, we can easily miss out on seeing those the Lord has in mind for us to serve. Being in Bangkok, every day we walked over a pedestrian bridge between our home and the hospital. And almost every day there was a beggar sitting there. All of them were clearly physically and sometimes mentally challenged. So each day we had to choose whether to give them some food or money. It was impossible not to see these people. But it was a choice to help or not.

Here at home, we have choices each day too. As royal priests of God, we can see the injustice in our society that cry out for our attention and help. The homeless, the refugees, the unborn and the weak. How do we respond to the needs God puts before us each day? You don't have to feel guilty because you can't help meet every need. You should just help where you can. But don't be too focused on yourself. I read this quote from Daniel Groody recently where he says, "When one does not know how to make room for the Lord and the poor, one is not a master of his wealth but its slave." That was powerful. His point is that there is freedom in learning to help others. You give and serve to bless others but, you yourself in turn, receive the blessing of being unshackled from slavery to your own money and success. You learn, instead, that the Lord provides.

I love the story of an elderly man named Carl. He was quiet. And before his retirement, he took the bus to work each morning and those who loved him wondered if he would make it through the changing uptown neighbourhood with its ever-increasing random violence, gangs and drug activity.

Carl saw a flyer at his church in that neighbourhood asking for volunteers to care for the gardens. Without fanfare, he signed up and got to work. He did so for over two decades.

He was well into his 87th year when one hot summer day three gang members approached him as he was watering the garden. Ignoring their intimidations, Carl simply asked, "Would you like a drink from the hose?" The tallest and toughest-looking of the three said, "Yeah, sure," with an evil little smile. As Carl offered the hose to him, the other two grabbed Carl's arm, throwing him down. The hose snaked crazily over the ground, dousing everything in its way, including Carl. Meanwhile, the thugs stole his watch and wallet, and then fled.

The minister had witnessed the attack from his window, but he couldn't get there fast enough to stop it. When he got there, he said, "Carl, are you okay? Are you hurt?" as he helped Carl to his feet. Carl just passed a hand over his brow and sighed, shaking his head. "Just some punk kids. I hope they'll wise-up someday." Then he bent to pick up the hose and started to water again.

Confused and a little concerned, the minister asked, "Carl, what are you doing?" "I've got to finish my watering. It's been very dry lately," Carl calmly replied. The minister could only marvel.

A few weeks later the three gang members returned. Just as before, their threat was unchallenged. Carl once again offered them a drink from his hose. This time they didn't rob him but grabbed the hose and drenched him head to toe. After listening to their big talk as they walked away, Carl once again turned toward the warmth giving sun, picked up his hose, and went on with his watering.

As fall approached, Carl was doing some tilling when he was startled by the sudden approach of someone behind him. He stumbled and fell into some evergreen branches. He turned to see the tall leader of his summer tormentors reaching down for him. "Don't worry old man. I'm not going to hurt you this time." The young man spoke softly, offering his tattooed and scarred hand to Carl.

When Carl was up, the man pulled a crumpled bag from his pocket and handed it to him. "What's this?" Carl asked. "It's your stuff," the man explained. "It's your stuff back. Even the money in your wallet." "I don't understand," Carl said. "Why would you help me now?"

Somewhat ill at ease, the young man spoke: "I learned something from you. I ran with that gang. We picked on you because you were old and we knew we could do it. But every time we came and did something to you, instead of yelling and fighting back, you tried to give us a drink. You didn't hate us. You kept showing love against our hate." He stopped for a moment. "I couldn't sleep after we stole your stuff, so here it is back." He paused for another awkward moment, and concluded, "That bag's my way of saying thanks for straightening me out, I guess." And with that, he walked off down the street.

Carl looked down at the sack in his hands and gingerly opened it. He took out his retirement watch and put it back on his wrist. Opening his wallet, he checked for his wedding photo. He gazed for a moment at the young bride that still smiled back at him from all those years ago.

Carl died one cold day after Christmas that winter. Many people attended his funeral in spite of the weather. In particular, the minister noticed a tall young man that he didn't know sitting quietly in a distant corner of the church. The minister spoke of Carl's garden as a lesson in life. "Do your best and make your garden as beautiful as you can," he said. "We will never forget Carl and his garden."

The following spring another flyer went up. It read: "Person needed to care for Carl's garden." The flyer went unnoticed by the busy parishioners. But one day, the minister got a knock on the door. Opening it, the minister saw a pair of scarred and tattooed hands holding the flyer. "I believe this is my job, if you'll have me," the young man said. The minister recognized him as the same young man who had returned the stolen watch and wallet to Carl. He knew that Carl's kindness had turned this man's life around. As the minister handed him the keys to the garden shed, he said, "Yes, go take care of Carl's garden and honor him."

The man went to work and, over the next several years, he tended the flowers and vegetables just as Carl had done. In that time, he went to college, got married, and became a prominent member of the community. But he never forgot his promise to Carl's memory and kept the garden as beautiful as he thought Carl would have kept it. One day he approached the minister and told him that he couldn't care for the garden any longer. He explained with a shy and happy smile, "My wife just had a baby boy last night, and she's bringing him home on Saturday." "Well, congratulations!" said the minister, as he was handed the garden shed keys. "That's wonderful! What's the baby's name?" "Carl," he replied.

Congregation, seeking the good of your neighbours and our city is not that hard. Keep your eyes open in your daily activities. God is always at work in the lives of people all around us. Our calling is to step in and be his instruments of light and love in this world. In this way, God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. "We reflect a Holy God to the world around us. So when people look at your life, what do they believe about God?" What does your life say that you believe about God? Whether we are 7 or 87, our prayer as well as our calling and desire should be that people see Christ reflected in our actions. We want them to see that we serve Jesus as our king and that because he is gracious and loving, we seek to be the same. With the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek God's will being done through our lives as it is being done in heaven.