

Holy God, Holy People

by Michael Flowers

The Church is one and holy because of God's love and work in us, and we are called to live a holy life, devoted to the cross of Christ and self-denial.

Duration: 26:34

Scripture: Hosea 1:10, Matthew 22:14, 1 Peter 1:13-16, 1 Peter 2:9-10

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of holiness as mentioned in 1 Peter. He emphasizes the importance of setting our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The preacher explains that holiness is not something we achieve on our own, but rather it is a result of God's work in us through the Holy Spirit. He highlights the significance of confession and the cleansing power of the Word of God and baptism in maintaining our holiness. The sermon concludes by emphasizing that our holiness is a continuous process of conversion, transformation, and devotion to Jesus.

Transcript

You'll notice in your notes there, we are working through four marks of the church and we find the four marks of the church in the Nicene Creed that we profess every Sunday. And it goes like this. We believe we believe in one holy Catholic apostolic church.

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about what one church means. It's one church because Jesus has one body. He doesn't have multiple bodies.

He has multiple members of one body. Right. He has diversity of gifts in that one body.

And we're spread throughout the world as one body of Christ. Jesus said, I will build my church, my one church. And so we confess that the church is one.

We talked about how the unity of the faith must be maintained. And that's our conversion process as we submit and become humble and gentle and forgiving and loving. This is our journey that we're all on in becoming more like Jesus so that we can maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

That's what we're striving for as we gather together and as we celebrate our life as a community. It's all because of the Holy Spirit, isn't it? All of us have gathered today because in some way the Holy Spirit has

led us to one another. Otherwise, we wouldn't know each other.

And when I met the Lord, I found myself loving and hanging out and going to a church with people very, very different than I was raised. And so that was a mark of my conversion to me. I could doubt my conversion, but I couldn't doubt the embrace and the love that I was receiving from the church that the word had placed me in.

A little Appalachian church in the foothills of Georgia. And I came in as an ex-druggy musician with hair down to here. And I was the only one that looked like that in that church.

That was a part of my conversion is being able to receive love and to return that love to people that were not like me. And so the church is one. But we also, by faith, confess that the church is holy.

Wow. Holy. Do you relate to yourself as holy? The way our culture views holiness is it's not really in the vernacular of our culture unless it's something like Holy Roller or something like that.

We have no category for holy in the secular world unless it's a bit negative. Well, today that we're worshipping in a sanctuary provided by the fruit of the Wesleyan holiness movement, actually, the Wesleyan holiness movement of the early 1800s. The Church of the Nazarenes is one of the later offshoots assembling together and founding in 1908.

The Church of the Nazarene was inspired by the theology and experience of John and Charles Wesley. And, you know, we equate John and Charles Wesley with Methodism, right? And that's right, to a certain degree. But we cannot forget that John and Charles Wesley died Anglicans.

John Wesley did not know anything of the Methodist denomination as we know it today. But John Wesley and Charles, all of the great hymns came forth from Charles. I mean, it's good to have a brother that writes worship music, right? And so they were set ablaze and they were aiming to renew what had gone amiss and awry in the Church of England.

And the Church of England could not receive them. And so they started preaching out in the fields and on the streets, which was really illegal for an Anglican to do. You could only preach in a sanctuary like this.

And they broke all the rules and saw thousands and thousands of people come to Christ that wouldn't enter into a church like this. So it's a good thing. That's the heritage that we're enjoying as we worship here.

And so in light of this rich biblical word holy, let's look at the second mark of the church as we confess in the Nicene Creed. And I would say that, first of all, when we say we believe all of these statements in the Nicene Creed are statements of faith. It takes eyes of faith to see one holy Catholic apostolic church.

It's like the illustration of being on the inside, looking out through stained glass. We're on the inside and we can see the unity, the holiness, the the preciousness of the church. As you come to him, as Peter was saying this morning in the reading, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, is that the way you see yourself? That's the way God sees you.

You are chosen and you are precious. And we have to remind ourselves of this as we hear the voice of judgment inside of us, as we're attempting to be better and better and better as our bishop was preaching last week. Oh, self-improvement, competition with one another.

It's just a disease that we have to say, no, I'm not in that race. I'm in Christ and because I'm in Christ Jesus, I'm chosen and I'm precious in the sight of God. I think some of us need to confess that sometimes to ourselves in prayer, I am precious in the sight of God and began to believe that because that will draw you closer to the father.

You see, we must receive the good news of the gospel before we can ever function as a kingdom of priests to serve our Lord and our God. And so I just want to encourage you today. You're loved by God more than you could ever, ever imagine.

The church is one because Jesus has only one body, his visible church on earth. But you know what? The church is not only on the earth. As the scripture teaches, we have come to the church of the firstborn in the heavenly Zion of Hebrews 12, there is an invisible church and that is the megachurch.

That is the megachurch some 2000 years old. And if we go back and you know where Moses and Elijah are talking to Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, it reaches back and back and back to those who have been redeemed by Jesus when he descended into the realm of the dead and lay captivity captive. Yeah.

And so the transfiguration is that beautiful picture of Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets and the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, Jesus glowing. But it's not only Jesus going, it's Moses and Elijah as well. They appeared to him in glory, the scripture says, and that, my friends, is our destiny.

That is our hope that the transfiguration is not only for Jesus, the transfiguration is a picture of redeemed humanity to be fully human and fully alive. That is our destiny. There is a visible church and we're very familiar with that, with all of the issues that we're going through and all of the conversion that we're experiencing, especially if we get close to one another and get together and do real life community.

There's a lot of opportunity for more conversion as we rub together as a people. Right. Iron sharpening iron, as it were.

Right. That's a good thing. Endure that process and get sharpened by another brother or sister.

But the church is also holy. The church is holy because God is holy. The church is one because God is one.

The church is holy because God is holy in whom we are baptized and indwelt as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Right. So our baptism into the body of Christ is what we've experienced.

We've been baptized into a body, the mystical body of Christ, his church, his bride. Paul tells the church in Corinth about the reality of their baptism in chapter six, 11, when he says, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. I want to say that again.

You were washed in the waters of baptism, cleansed of all sin. You were sanctified, that is, by Jesus and by the spirit. You were sanctified in the waters of baptism that is made holy and set apart as God's very own possession.

As a new creation and you were justified, the penalty of sin and death was broken over you through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the cross. But it says in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God,

therefore, our holiness is God's doing. Our holiness is God's doing.

And by his reconciling, regenerating and sanctifying presence within us, we are born anew, born anew, born from above, born again, new creation. It all means the same thing. Born from above, born anew, born again, new creation.

It's all talking about a new birth through the word of Jesus Christ, the living word, a chosen race called the people of God, a people for God's own possession. But is it all God's doing without participation? That's what we have to ask. As we look back to the reading today in First Peter, let's be reminded, beginning with verse 13, therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded.

Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, at the second coming of Jesus Christ. That's a long term fixed hope, isn't it? As obedient children. Do not be conformed to the passions.

Of your former ignorance, as he who called you is holy. Here's an imperative, you also be holy. Not on your own.

Not to be better. But to be holy. Life, liberty and the pursuit.

Of holiness. As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, you see, that's where the rubber meets the road, right? Attitudes and conduct, since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. There's something indicative happening in our baptism that calls forth these commands.

We've been made holy. We've been made new creations. Now we get to live out that life of transformation and conversion day by day, day by day.

It's not a one off event of receiving Jesus and then it's over. Conversion is a lifetime. Conversion is transformation into the glorious image of Jesus.

That's what holiness might look like. It might look like Jesus, a conformity to the image of Jesus Christ himself, the holy one. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

Conduct yourselves with fear. Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed. Here he goes again.

What kind of fear is he referring to? An unapproachable sort of fear that keeps you at arm's distance with the father? No, not at all, because you're chosen and beloved. It's a sense of awe. It's a sense of deep appreciation when we fully understand the work of Jesus Christ and how that has affected us before the father.

And we can never, never master it. Right. It's a mystery that keeps on giving the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, keeps on giving, keeps on pulling us closer and closer in praise to him.

You were ransomed, you were bought with a price from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers with the precious blood of Christ, like the lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but he was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, through Jesus, were believers in the father, through Jesus, we are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God. That's how the

church is holy, is really taking that in, meditating on that and letting that bring transformation.

You may take in just a little bit of this. I'm still taking in just little bits of this and it never gets old because it's the new covenant that never gets old. It's the new wine that he pours out that never gets old.

It's eternal. And it keeps on pouring into us eternal life revelation. Therefore, we show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So if the church is holy, why do we confess our sins every time we come together? Right. I would say this is how we stay holy. You see, this is not like the church is holy.

Therefore, we have some sort of status above other people that turns into that holier than thou posture. If we truly get the holiness of God in the gospel of Jesus, we will be the most humble people on Earth. We will be so leveled by our attempts to get better and to impress the world and to impress people by our accolades, by our intelligence, by our physical postures and our physical blessings or whatever it may be that we put our trust in.

No. Paul said in counting all of his accolades, man, he had a lot of them. He said, I counted all is done.

I counted all is done for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord. There it is. And he says, I haven't already attained it.

Nope. But I keep pressing up. I keep pressing forward toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

So when we confess our sins, we use the plural, don't we? We confess that we have sinned against you. We're not only confessing our personal sins, I would say, but we're confessing our corporate sins. We are identifying with the corporate nature of the brokenness and the struggles of the church in battle.

We are in battle. The church invisible is in glory and they're praying for us as we battle out principalities and powers, Ephesians say. And so we're corporately identifying with the whole church.

Think about that as you confess your sins this morning and you say, we, we confess our sins. We take on that identification of the whole body of Christ that we have sinned. This is a call to live a cruciform life, a life devoted to the cross of Christ, devoted to self-denial, as Peter is saying, a denial of disordered passions.

First, Peter 113, Christ sanctifies the church and in turn through him and with him, the church is his agent of sanctification in the world. The body of Christ is his agent of sanctification in the world through the ministry of the church and the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord pours forth abundant graces, especially through the sacraments, but also through the diverse gifts that each of you have.

As you enter back out, as you're sent out, having eaten the body and blood of Christ and heard the good news and you're sent back into your spheres of influence where you can actually be a sanctifying agent in Jesus. Listen to what Jesus has done for the church, and he's equating it to marriage in Ephesians 5. He says, Husbands, love your wives. And get this, guys, as Christ loved the church.

Whoa, that's a biggie. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. And here's what Christ has done for the church.

He gave himself up for her. The church is a she. It's a bride being adorned for her husband, Jesus Christ, the marriage supper of the lamb, the end of history.

Love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, that he might set her apart, that he might make her holy. How? Having cleansed her by the washing of the water of the word in your baptism, this is what happens. You were washed.

You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God so that he might present the church to himself. Eschatologically, there that time when we meet the Lord and things begin to come into fullness so that he might present the church to himself in splendor.

A glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. That she might be holy, that she might be holy and without blemish, I want you to think about that this morning. These are the purposes of God for us today.

And it's on a continuum of conversion, of transformation and our devotion to Jesus as we say, yes, Lord, as we say, yes. How might we be a sanctifying agent? And we give you one example, the liturgical calendar, which we're getting ready to start a new year in Advent. And we're going to begin to walk through the reconciling life of Jesus Christ and the promise of the Old Testament and the prophets.

And we're going to celebrate the coming of the Lord, the first advent and anticipate the second advent as well. And then we will walk through the epiphany at its baptism. We will walk through the life of Christ each Sunday, reading and celebrating the Eucharist around this movement of Jesus in his first advent, coming and teaching and making disciples and gathering his church and then going to the cross and being raised on the third day.

And sending the Holy Spirit to live with us forever, that's the liturgical cycle right there each Sunday as we gather together. We sanctify time. We sanctify time by saying in Jesus that before his death and resurrection, time was headed towards death.

But through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, time has been reversed and it's headed towards life. And as we celebrate the life and the death of Jesus in the Eucharist, we're sanctifying time and we're proclaiming that death has been destroyed. That is a part of your priesthood.

That is why you're a kingdom of priests. That's a part of your priesthood. Is to be that part of sanctifying time and we will do this until the Lord returns, right? The church will celebrate the Eucharist until the Lord returns the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so Peter ends this beautiful passage today, first Peter to 10. Let's look at that. He gives us corporate identity and it's all based in the old covenant, that God's covenant with the nation of Israel.

And he's saying that in Jesus, Jesus has fulfilled all of the covenantal requirements in this one new man and has created a new breed of humanity. The new man, Jesus Christ, the new human being, the one who is fully alive, the one who is fully human, is seated at the right hand of God and he's praying for us in his priesthood. He's praying for royal priesthood to rise up and realize that now through him, we're a chosen race.

That's talking about election. We're chosen and beloved because primarily we're chosen in the sun, the elect one, the chosen one, which Jesus heard this. The father spoke this word of election over him at his

baptism.

You are my chosen one. We're a royal priesthood, a better translation of that in reading through this week would be a kingdom of priest. That is, we're a house of kings and queens and we are a priesthood ruling and reigning in life.

And that royal priesthood happens through worship and witness. It happens here as the church gathers together and we set the sacraments apart and we worship the Lord together and we reaffirm our new identity in Jesus. And then we're sent out into the world to be kings and priests and prophets for the Lord.

A royal priesthood, a holy nation. That word is ethnos there. It's a new species, a holy nation.

We've come. We have a common calling as Christians cut through the frontiers of culture and history and given a new status in Jesus Christ, a holy nation and a people for his own possession. It's a beautiful image.

And all of this is leading to one purpose, Peter is saying, to proclaim the excellencies, to proclaim the phrases of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. And then he ends, he says, once you were not a people. Do you know where he's quoting that from? He's quoting that from Hosea.

Not a people was one of the names of the children of Gomer. Not not a people was an illegitimate child. And he's taking that message of Hosea and he's saying, we're we're not a community of angels, but we are being relentlessly pursued by a loving God who keeps covenant faithfulness wooing us to himself as Hosea was learning with his unfaithful wife.

Not a people once you were not a people, once you were illegitimate. But now you are the people of God. I love that.

I love the way Peter ends that once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Father, we thank you so much for one holy Catholic Apostolic Church, and we thank you that you call us holy.

We're a holy nation and your Holy Spirit is sanctifying us and justifying us and washing us. The bride is making herself ready for the marriage supper of the lamb. Lord, today, I pray that each and every heart would draw close to you and realize that we are chosen and beloved in Jesus Christ.

And that would draw us closer and closer to you in prayer, in devotion, in wonder, in declaring your praise. Who called us out of darkness into your marvelous light. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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