

Blessing of Unity

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. If you're new or visiting with us, welcome. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together as one community, we've become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, his forgiveness, and no one so bad that they can't have it. And so we come to God's word over and over again and again, week after week, because we believe that God has something to say to every one of us. He has something to say to us if we have been Christians our entire lives, if we can't remember a time when we weren't Christians. He has something to say to us if we've been Christians for a very short amount of time. And he also has something to say to us if we would not consider ourselves Christians, if we're people who have questions or doubts or objections to Christianity. If you're with us, you know that over the summer, we went through a series on the Psalms, which we finished last week. And now we're starting a new series in the book of 1 Peter.

And the 1 Peter is a letter, and it's a letter written by a man named Peter. And he writes this to groups of Christians in the first century who live in what is now modern-day Turkey.

And he writes to these Christians because they are, as they live, as they follow Jesus, the fact that they're Christians is making them feel out of place in the world. And not only is it making them feel out of place in the world, they're also facing opposition from the world. Peter writes knowing that they're feeling out of place and they're facing opposition, and he does this to encourage them and help them understand and know how it is they should live in the world and why they should continue living that way. In other words, the book of 1 Peter is a book about what it means to be in the world, but not of the world. And it's also a book about what it means to represent Jesus to the world. It's a book about being in the world, but not of the world, while also representing Jesus to the world. And it's a book about why Jesus is worth that. Why he's worth living and loving for. Why he's worth suffering for. And why the recipients of this letter, the people who are living in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, should continue loving and following Jesus. And so the question that this book answers and addresses is the question we're going to begin to talk about this morning. What do we do? How do we respond? How do we think about the reality that when we live in this world, oftentimes we feel very out of place if we're following Jesus? How should we think about that? How do we begin to address it? It's the last question that we come to this letter, and we're going to be reading just the first couple verses. You're going to find this printed in your worship guide near the end. You can also find it on your Bible or your phone. And as we come to this, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. It's for that reason that we read now, starting with verse 1, I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[3 : 49] Father in heaven, we thank you, as always, that you have not left us to figure out this world on our own, but that you come and you speak to us. You've given us your word and your instructions that we would know what you want and what you love, and that we would want and love those things as well.

We also know that we are hard of hearing, and unless you help us, we are helpless. We ask that you would send your spirit now to do that, that you would open up our eyes so that we could see, you'd unstop our ears so that we could hear, you'd soften our hearts so that we could believe, and you'd clear our minds so that we could understand everything that you've written in your word about your son. And we ask these things not because we have earned them, but because you, Jesus has

earned them for us, and we ask him in his name. Amen.

There was a time in my life about five years ago where I had a very challenging decision that I had to make, and as I look back now, I think it was probably one of the most challenging decisions that I've ever had to make in my life. And so knowing the gravity of that, I realized that I was in way over my head.

I didn't have the wisdom to think through what I needed to think through. I knew this decision had a lot of consequences. This is not important to what I'm going to tell you, but basically I had to make a decision whether I was going to continue in a relationship or not, and I began to realize that this might not be the place for me. This might be something that I had to exit. I wasn't going to make that decision lightly, and I also knew that I needed tremendous wisdom, and I didn't necessarily believe that everyone around me had it. If you're like me, there's times where you have talked to various people. You know there's certain things you need to talk to someone who's 10 years ahead of you to get advice about. So if I need counsel about how to be a pastor, I don't call up a first-year seminary student. Instead, I call up someone who's been seasoned for decades. There's some decisions where maybe you need to talk to someone 20 years ahead of you. Maybe there's some that you need to talk to someone 30 years ahead of you. This decision that I was facing, I felt like it was the type of decision where I needed to talk to someone who was far, far ahead of me on the journey, someone who was seasoned and experienced in life and as a counselor.

And so I knew a man that I had a relationship with for a long time who was in his 60s, and I thought, this is a 60-plus question. This is a 60-plus problem. I'm not going to talk to someone in their 30s. I knew someone in their 50s, and I thought, you know, this is, I need someone who's got the four-decade advantage on me for this one.

[6 : 27] And so I spent time on the phone trying to schedule an appointment with this man. I drove several hours to meet with him. He did not live close to me. And we sat down, and I explained to him this entire situation, this decision that I had to make, all the complicating factors, what I was afraid of, and either whether I stayed or I left. And so this man, he sat down, and he listened, and he gave me his counsel. He talked through all the issues with me, gave me his advice, told me what he thought about what I was facing. And he was able to do that because he was someone with credibility and experience. He knew what he was talking about. He'd been talking to people about these sorts of things, not for 10, not for 20, but 30, 40 years. As we come to the letter of 1 Peter, Peter is a man in this letter with incredible credibility and seasoning. He knows what he's talking about. Peter writes this near the end of his life. And of course, he tells us, verse 1, he's an apostle. That's his credentials. And that tells us that he's someone who's a representative, a representative of Jesus who can speak authoritatively for the church about Jesus' life and Jesus' teachings.

And so that's his position. That's his credential, his credibility. But Peter has even more than that. Peter has lived for decades as someone who knows Jesus and follows Jesus. And he is someone who has experienced what it means to belong to God and be chosen by God. And not only has he experienced for decades what it means to belong to God and be chosen by God, he also knows what it's like from firsthand experience to suffer for God. He has lived for years. And so he writes as someone that we should listen to. He has lived everything that he talks about. And he hasn't been perfect. We meet Peter for the first time. He grew up in a small town called Bethsaida, which is right outside the Sea of Galilee, which is a place where much of Jesus' ministry took place. It was on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Now, Jesus, if you're familiar, grew up in Nazareth, which was southwest of the Sea of Galilee.

And I tell you that so that you know that if Jesus and Peter lived today, their high school football teams would have played each other. Now, whether Jesus' team would have won or Peter's team would have won, I'm going to leave that theological knot for you to untie at lunch today. But Peter and Jesus would have been in the same territory. Peter was a fisherman. That's how he grew up. And at some point, because of his career as a fisherman, he entered into business. He had a business partnership with his brother, who is named Andrew. And there's another brother set, James and John, that they joined together with. And they were in Capernaum, which if you're familiar with Jesus' ministry, you know that was a headquarters for where he had his ministry. And Andrew was an early adopter. Peter was not.

So Andrew was tracking with John the Baptist, and he was the one who introduced Peter to Jesus. And Peter meets Jesus, and when he meets him, he's not interested necessarily in following Jesus, but Jesus decides that Peter's going to follow him. And so he tells him, I'm going to make you a

fisher of men.

Peter continues to follow after Jesus, having this relationship with Jesus, living with him for multiple years, and Peter makes mistakes over and over again. If you're familiar with Peter, you know that he misunderstands Jesus and his mission. At one point, he rebukes Jesus, and Jesus refers to him as Satan. At another time later in his career, Paul has to rebuke Peter. But Peter continues following after Jesus again and again, and we see throughout his life, Peter changes and grows. Peter rebukes Jesus for wanting to suffer at the beginning of his time with Jesus. And now near the end of his time, after Jesus' death, near the end of Peter's life, he's going to write to these people about suffering.

[10:21] And I've just firehosed you with a bunch of facts about Peter, and I do that sometimes. I don't expect you to remember all this, but the point that I want to make is this. Peter was a real man.

Peter did not have a halo. Instead, he worked with his hands. Peter did not do everything perfectly. He didn't say everything perfectly. Instead, sometimes he put his foot in his mouth. In fact, he put his foot in his mouth over and over again.

Peter wasn't just a real man, though. Peter had a real relationship with Jesus. And because Peter had a real relationship with Jesus, he experienced a fundamental change in his identity, in his character, and his behavior.

Peter had a real relationship with Jesus. Because he had a real relationship with Jesus, he experienced a fundamental change in his identity, in his character, and his behavior.

Everything that he writes about in these first two verses, he writes about from what he knows in his experience. And so he knows that he's been chosen by Jesus, and so that's how he writes to the people who are receiving this letter. He says, to those who are elect, exiles. Now this word elect is a technical theological term, and I'm going to explain it to you, hopefully in such a way right now that you're never going to forget it.

[11:51] Maybe I'm optimistic. An elect is not a word that we use in English. It's not one that we're familiar with, except in one instance. Every four years, we have in this country a what?

We have an election. An election is when we choose someone. We choose someone to represent us. So if someone is elect, the term theologically, when we talk about the elect, we're talking about those God has chosen.

Jesus chose Peter. When Jesus first met Peter, at least one of the first meetings, he went out on a boat with him. And when Jesus, when Peter understood Jesus' power, first of all, Jesus just asked to borrow his boat, because he wanted to speak to a large crowd of people, and he knew that if he went out on the water, the water would project his voice.

Peter was fine with that. He was going to go out in the water with Jesus. That wasn't a big deal.

Remember, his brother Andrew had been an early adopter. Andrew knew John the Baptist. He was aware of Jesus. So, Peter was connected in this way.

And then Jesus performs this miracle for Peter, in which Peter had not been able to catch any fish. And suddenly, Jesus made it so that he caught so many fish, his net broke. Do you remember what Peter does after that?

[13:10] He doesn't say, wow, I really want to follow you, Jesus. Doesn't say, this man is very powerful. I want to be connected to him. Peter says, get as far away from me as you can.

Because I am a sinful man. Peter did not choose Jesus. Jesus chose Peter.

Peter has experienced everything that he is writing to these people about. He has experienced the fact that God chose him.

And so, the first thing that he reminds his readers of is that God has chosen them as well. As we are looking and trying to make sense of all of this, Peter continues to tell to them the same thing that he knows.

We are going to come back to exiles. In a minute, he tells them that God has chosen them. And then he tells them what that means. All these places that he mentions, those are just places in Asia Minor. So, he is simply saying, hey, you all live in lots of different areas in modern day Turkey.

[14:24] And then he tells them about their choosing. This choosing happened according to the foreknowledge of God, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with his blood. Now, for us, this might sound like a lot of technical theological language.

For Peter, it was his story. Peter is telling us what he experienced. Jesus chose him. Verse 2, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

In other words, Peter knows that it's not because of anything that he has done that he belongs to God and has been chosen by God. He has walked with Jesus too long to think that. He is with Jesus, not because of his faithfulness, ultimately, but because of Jesus' faithfulness. Not only has God chosen him, not only did Jesus choose him, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, we're in verse 2 still, but also in sanctification of the Spirit.

Peter knows that following Jesus means that he's going to become more and more like Jesus. That's what sanctification means. It's the process by which we become more and more like Jesus. Peter has become more and more like Jesus.

[15 : 36] This is someone who rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering and now is writing a letter about suffering. This is someone who didn't always know how to be diplomatic, who's now a leader in God's church.

Peter has experienced the process of having a real relationship with Jesus and he knows that because of his time with Jesus, Jesus has changed him. His story is what he's telling us about in verse 2 and he knows that that story, that hope, is the same thing that's offered to and is true of the people who are reading this.

They also need to know that they've been chosen by God. They need to know that if they have a relationship with Jesus, a real one in the way that Peter did, that God will change them. He will make them more like Jesus.

And then Peter also knows that his job and his story is one of for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. Peter's also famous for betraying Jesus the night that he died because he didn't want to suffer.

Peter denied Jesus and claimed he didn't know him. And now he's writing this letter to people telling them to claim Jesus' name even when it leads to suffering.

[17 : 00] And he has claimed Jesus' name and it's led to suffering. And so the sanctification, the change that Peter has experienced because of his relationship with Jesus has led to obedience to Jesus Christ.

Jesus has changed him in such a way that he obeys God more and more. In fact, Jesus commissioned him near the end of the Gospel of John and he tells Peter, guess what, Peter? At the end of your life, you're going to have things happen to you that you don't want to happen and you're going to have people take you places where you don't want to go. And finally, Peter knows that all of this comes from sprinkling with Jesus' blood.

Peter has not earned anything from God. Jesus didn't choose Peter because he was the first round pick. He didn't choose him because he was the smartest.

He didn't choose him because he got along better with people than others. He didn't choose Peter because of Peter's skill as a fisherman. In fact, we know that he wasn't able to catch any fish when Jesus came to him. Peter knows that it's God's grace that has made him a follower of Jesus.

[18 : 13] And he knows that this obedience is imperfect, that he has betrayed Jesus at points in his life and he hasn't always followed him perfectly, but it's Jesus' death and his resurrection that allows him to be chosen by God in the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ.

Peter was the one who betrayed Jesus and claimed that he didn't know him. And after Jesus died and gave up his blood, Jesus came back and restored Peter.

Peter's the one who got really ambitious and decided when Jesus was walking on the Sea of Galilee, the place where he had originally gone out with Jesus and Jesus had told him he wanted to be a fisher of men, that's the place where Jesus told Peter to come to him on the water and to walk on water with him.

Peter knows that he took his eyes off Jesus and started to drown. He also knows that Jesus didn't take his eyes off him.

Peter belongs to God and he's been chosen by God. And he writes to people in Asia Minor who are feeling out of place in the world and facing opposition from the world to remind them that they have been chosen by God and they belong to God.

[19 : 29] And so if you are here this morning and you have faith in Christ, you're following after Jesus, you have a real relationship with Jesus in the way that Peter did, God has chosen you.

And God has chosen you in the way similarly, now not identical, right? He's not chosen you as an apostle. I hate to break the news to you, but he has chosen you similarly to the way he's called Peter.

That is that he has called you even though you are flawed and broken and sinful. Even though, like Peter, you can look back to places in your life where you've done things that you wish you could undo.

Jesus has chosen you in that way. And if he's chosen you just like Peter, you're going to become more and more like Jesus and it's going to result in obedience, but even that obedience does not take away your need for the sprinkling of Jesus' blood.

How do we make sense, how do we think about a world in which we feel out of place? Peter doesn't begin by telling them, giving them a worldview analysis.

[20 : 52] He doesn't break down what's wrong with the philosophies around them. He doesn't start with scandalous stories about things that have happened to Christians.

He doesn't start out with a list of do's and don'ts, reminding them of their responsibilities. Instead, he starts out by reminding them, as you are living in this world, as you're seeking to be in the world but not of the world, and you want to represent Jesus to the world, the first thing you need to know is that God chose you.

You're not here by accident. You are here. We are here in 2019, on September 1st, in Colorado Springs, because God has chosen us and this is where he wants us to be.

That's what they need to know more than anything else. That's what these people need to hear and understand. They need to know, like Peter, God's chosen them.

And they need to know that, like Peter, when they take their eyes off Jesus, as one man has put it, Jesus doesn't take his eyes off them. If we're living in this world and we're facing opposition, if we have not decided and figured out that God has chosen us and we belong to him, nothing else matters.

[22 : 25] Our resolve doesn't matter. Our understanding of the flaws of the world around us doesn't matter. Our ability to know and understand things that are happening in political systems and the ways that people might be working to create opposition against Christians and the things that we need to think about and know, none of that matters unless we know that God has chosen us and we belong to him.

Most letters in the New Testament start out by saying, dear church or dear saints. Peter doesn't say, dear church or dear saints, because he knows these people need to hear something even more than that.

Why is it that these people need to know so desperately in ways that recipients of other letters in the New Testament don't need to know? Why do these people need to know so clearly at the very beginning that they are elect, that they belong to God?

The reason that they need to know that they are elect is because they are also, verse one, exiles. They need to know that they are elect because they are also exiles.

Now we have to clear up this term exile as we jump into it. This has a lot of confusion sometimes among Christians what it means to be an exile. We don't just get to put all the meaning we want to onto this word. This word is talking about someone who does not have citizenship in the country that they live in.

[23 : 48] Potentially someone who is of a different culture. Now some people will take this word exile and they'll apply it to the physical world, the creation. Peter here is talking about a social political exile.

In other words, I'm not going to go on a hike up North Cheyenne Canyon and look out on the beauty of the mountains and the glory of this city and say, man, that is a great view.

And it is so beautiful and God's the creator of the heaven and the earth. But you know what? I'm in exile and it's all going to burn. It is not that type of exile that he's talking about.

He is talking about a social political exile. These people are living in a country, in a world where those around them socially don't value the same things that they value and so this leads to them being ridiculed at the very least.

Sometimes maybe they've lost opportunities for jobs and employment. It's a political exile. The things that they value are different than the things that the government they're with values. And so there might be times where their values and the government's values come into conflict.

[24 : 54] So he wants them to know that they are also exiles. They should think of themselves that way. They should not be surprised when following Jesus results in opposition in the world and from the world.

They live in a world where they're not citizens. This might actually be literally true of some of the recipients, but Peter here is making a spiritual point for them that when they value the things that God values and they love the things that God loves, there are going to be many times and many places where they will feel out of place in this world and it will lead to opposition and suffering. And just like Peter is telling his story with everything else, Peter is also knowing his story here because Peter is someone who has decided to suffer for and face opposition for Jesus because he loves him.

He believes that everything that he's done is true. He's experienced the reality of Jesus' resurrection. And so he's willing, even though he's someone who early in his life hated suffering and thought it had nothing to do with Christianity, he's willing to suffer for Jesus as an exile. And he writes as someone who's experienced four decades and has tremendous credibility. Peter has been in prison. Peter was in prison because of Jesus.

[26 : 07] Peter knows what it's like to be in exile. Jesus told him, remember in the end of John, he was going to go places he did not want to go. And guess what?

Peter went places he didn't want to go. And Peter did it because he knew that he was chosen by God and God loved him.

God had changed him and he also knew the future that awaited for him. We, like Peter, are chosen by God.

We belong to God if we have faith in Christ. We, like Peter, are also exiles if we have faith in Christ. There will be times when our values and the values of the world around us come into direct conflict. There will be times when there are people who misunderstand us and speak poorly about us because of the things that we believe and do. And so what's true of the recipients of this letter is true of us as well.

[27 : 14] It's true for us when we come up against materialism in this world and we know that God's plan for us is that we value people and communities and trust in him over things.

We're going to feel like exiles in the world of consumerism. We're going to feel like exiles in the world of individualism. And we're also going to feel like exiles in a world of sexual anarchy. Peter's readers are going to hear about some of the things that they've had to give up and they're being slandered for. Now there's many things in this world that we feel like exiles for as we walk as Christians.

And I don't want to elevate this above everything else but I do want to say I know for many of you because I've talked with you many of you are facing the point of being in exile as you walk through this world and more and more what God has told us about how he's created us as men and women is less and less honored and true in this world in this culture.

And we have to navigate how it is that we're going to remain faithful to what we believe and also interact with those in the world around us. And it's something that we face where we have to think about and work through how are we going to engage that in our workplaces.

[28 : 36] Some of you actively right now more than a few of you are working through and thinking about what are you going to do with pronouns. And I'm not here to preach a political sermon to you.

There's many ways in which we feel like exiles but I would be remiss to not say that that we as a Christian church right now are facing the reality of feeling like exiles in this world for many reasons and that is one of them.

We're not the first Christians in the history of the world to feel that way. And we're not the first Christians in the history of the world to face those choices and those challenges.

God knows. Peter knows. Peter's experienced it. His readers are experiencing it. And he's writing to them to encourage them and instruct them to give them hope. For many of you becoming a Christian made your life not easier but harder.

And for many of you if you're going to continue as a Christian it's going to make your life not easier but harder. Peter begins this letter by reminding us of that fact that because we've been chosen by God we are exiles in the world.

[29 : 46] And we're exiles in this world because we've been chosen by God. And the only way that we're going to make it and survive as exiles the only way we're going to hold true is by knowing that God has chosen us and that he's our father.

That's the hope that Peter holds out to his readers. He wants grace and peace to be multiplied to them. The same grace and peace that he has experienced.

It's when they know that they are elect that they can survive and live as exiles. And so this is an introduction to the entire book.

Peter's going to end this book with a final command and a final word. You know how I feel about beginnings and endings of books. This is the beginning. I'm going to give you a spoiler alert.

Peter's going to end with one final command. He's going to say I've written all these things to you and I've exhorted you and I've declared to you that this is the true grace of God. So stand firm in it.

[30 : 54] Peter now is telling us those same two things at the beginning. This is the true grace of God. God has chosen you. He's chosen you in the foreknowledge of God the Father and the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

But you're in exile so stand firm. about 10 years ago I think it was the summer of 2010 I was at a church picnic a different church in a different part of the country and I didn't go into this picnic thinking that there would be a moment that I'd remember forever from it.

Just a pool party. This is at a neighborhood pool and we would do this several times throughout the summer as a church. And of course I would be remiss not to go in the pool but I don't really know what I'm doing so if you're on the diving board and you're not experienced or skilled like me you've got one or two classic plays.

You've got the cannonball. It's tried and true. Very faithful. You do kind of a scissors thing where you drop in and you just go down. That was all I had in my repertoire.

But there was one point where I decided okay this is my time. I need to get up. I need to go do this. I need to hit the diving board at some point. And so I came through a few times and I noticed as I was going through that there was this girl standing by the fence by the pool behind the diving boards and she was in line and these boys kept skipping her.

[32 : 22] So they would jump in front of her. They didn't care that she was in line. They'd just run on. They'd go on and they'd probably do something fancier than a cannonball. And she was just sitting there.

She wasn't doing anything. She wasn't interfering. She wasn't saying hey this really isn't fair. You shouldn't be skipping me like that. She was also the daughter of the pastor of the church and so I went up to her and I was just messing with her.

I said she was probably six or seven. I said Caroline you can't let them treat you like this. I mean they're jumping ahead of you. They're butting you in line. You've been waiting here patiently. Here you are you're just letting them do their thing. You can't do that. And then I said your dad your dad is the pastor. Now I'm not saying that pastor's kids should be able to do whatever they want. I could say that since I don't have kids. And she surprised me. She just looked at me and she smiled and she said I know.

[33 : 28] I know. Brothers and sisters when we know that God is our father and that he has chosen us and that we belong to him we can walk in obedience in this world even when it's hard.

And when we know that God is our father and we belong to him when we face suffering and opposition when we face those who treat us in ways that they shouldn't we're able to smile and have hope and joy because we know who our father is.

We can live as exiles because we are elect because we're chosen. Please pray with me. Dear father in heaven we thank you for the joy and the privilege of belonging to you.

We confess that we haven't earned it we don't deserve it but it's something that you've done for us. And so we ask that you'd remind us of that. You'd remind us of your choice that you delight in us that you've chosen us that you love us.

And we ask that you would use that to help us that like Peter we would keep following after you even when we fail and make mistakes knowing that your blood that sprinkles us through Jesus is enough.

[34 : 56] And that you'd give us everything we need to know to walk as exiles in this world faithful to you and loving you. We thank you that like Peter we don't have to earn this or deserve this but Jesus has done it for us and so we ask it in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.