

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Comtemplative Prayer – Psalm 13

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in pra

Leader reads through the passage, one line at a time. After each line is read, pause, and let participants spend a moment in prayer, based on the content of each line. At the end of the Psalm, leader can close the prayer time by praying by name for each person in the group : “God, may the truth of this psalm and the prayers of your people come to fruition in _____’s life.”

Icebreaker

When was the last time you felt like an outsider (at a party, work, school, etc.)?
Share the story with the group and how it made you feel.

Text for Discussion: I Peter 1:1-2

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

We live in a time of political polarization, critical humanitarian crises, and significant, divisive social issues. Meanwhile, the culture we live in has increasingly lost coherence with the Christian story that historically helped to shape it. All which beg the question of what faithfulness to Jesus should look like as we navigate these many challenges.

First Peter examines the relationship between the followers of Jesus and the surrounding culture. As God’s chosen people, we are resident aliens wherever we happen to live. Peter doesn’t lament this fact. Instead, he addresses how we can be a community stubbornly committed to following Christ for the renewal of the world into which we’ve been placed. Peter wrote at a time far more challenging for Christians than our own, and yet the church blossomed and thrived. So how are we called to respond?

The reality is we live in a time of unprecedented **opportunity** for the church. Our hope is in the risen Jesus, whose victory is certain. Our merciful God promises our labor for Him is never in vain. So in the midst of pervasive anger and fear, true followers of Christ have the opportunity to be faithfully and fruitfully present, animated by hope as ambassadors for Jesus, who engage the culture without melting invisibly into it.

Peter is addressing people where they live yet whose citizenship is elsewhere. As the reborn children of God, we are now citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20). As resident aliens (exiles) living away from our true homeland, we must reclaim the privilege of our calling as God’s children, living radically dissimilar lives to the world around us – lives that distinguish us as God’s people, lives that attract curiosity, lives of hopeful promise, lives that bear the light of our Savior – provoking questions that the Gospel alone can answer.

We should also expect to suffer disdain, mockery or worse for setting ourselves apart; we may not fit into or be valued by the world around us. But Peter reminds us that we have been chosen by God, His elect. Before the foundation of the world, God set His love on us, purely by grace, purely of His love. God doesn’t just call us to be set apart from the world around us; He *sets us apart* by sending His Spirit into our lives. And as we have been set apart, we are then called to live set-apart lives. The grace of God always comes first and roots us.

We have been chosen by God the Father, set apart by the Spirit of God, “for the obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with blood” (1 Peter 1:2). Were we left to rely on our willpower alone, we would be utterly unable to become the people God calls us to become. *But we have Christ!* We have been covered by the One who can atone for our lives, cleanse us of our guilty conscience, and empower us with the assurance that we can obediently live for Him.

There is electric hopefulness in the opening of Peter's letter. Because we have been set free and set apart by God, we have a chance to do something of prophetic beauty for our broken world. Living *in* Christ, we can live *for* Christ with a faithful and fruitful presence as resident aliens in the surrounding culture.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can we be “faithfully present” in a post-Christian, post-Christendom context?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

1. Rankin mentioned 5 transitions happening in our culture, as identified in the book, “After Christendom” by Stuart Murray. These included a movement of Christians...
 - o From the center to the margins of culture
 - o From the majority to the minority
 - o From settlers to sojourners
 - o From maintenance to mission

Which of these have you seen the most? Which have personally affected you the most? Counter-intuitively, what might be some of the advantages of this movement?

2. Read through the entire book of 1 Peter out loud as a group.
 - o What themes jump out at you? What images?
 - o What do find challenging here?
 - o What do you find hopeful?

3. Break into groups of 2-3, and spend some time pondering the characteristics of the identity of Jesus-followers that Peter mentions in the first two verses:
 - o Chosen/elect
 - o Sanctified by the Spirit
 - o Sprinkled with the blood of Jesus

Have each group of 2-3 pick one of the characteristics above, and list 5 advantages of it as a part of a person's identity in Christ.

4. Guiding Question: **How can we be “faithfully present” in a post-Christian, post-Christendom cultural context?**
 - o Name one way this week that you can be “faithfully present” in your workplace.
 - o Name one way that we can help each other do this as a community.
 - o List at least one spiritual practice you can engage in this week that will help form your soul towards these goals.

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Pray for one another based on your answers to question #4 above.
- Pray that we would seek God's will in our lives.