

**Be The Church - Part Two**  
**It's People**  
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This morning is part two of a new series we are doing called **“Be The Church”**.

Last week Pastor Brian had us look at the overall mission and purpose of the church. We have been given a great commission to be God’s representatives to everyone we meet.

We are his hands and feet and voice to a lost world of people separated from the God who made them and loves them.

Our mission is to help people connect with God through Jesus Christ. Last week Pastor Brian described our mission this way - **“We are followers of Jesus who help others follow Jesus.”**

This week we want to focus on who the church is. There is a great description of the church in 1 Peter 2.

Before we read this text let me explain the broader definition of the church. The bible refers to two aspects of church life.

**FIRST**– **There is the governmental part of the church.** In the bible we see there are ordained leaders and elders set in place to lead the church. A group meets the biblical definition of a church where there are clearly defined roles of biblical leadership, a clear missional vision, regular observance of the sacraments and accountability to apostolic leadership.

So not every house group or bible study is a church in itself.

**SECOND** – **There is the organic part of church life - the people and relational part.** This is the church in action – caring and reaching. This is the part we are talking about in this series.

Let’s read Peter’s description of the church. The organic part of what it means to be the church in action.

## READ 1 Peter 2:9-10.

This description Peter gives was once only true of the Jewish people but now in the New Covenant it is true of all followers of Jesus. We have been grafted into the vine of Abraham.

Let's unpack these two powerful verses. They give us our identity as followers of Jesus and as his church. They define who we are.

**The first thing we notice is that these verses are talking about people and not buildings. "You are a chosen people" Vs.9**

The way we use the word "church" today is often to describe the place where Christians meet to worship - an address and a building.

- We say, "I'm going to church" or "Which church do you attend?" We know what we mean but it's good to be reminded that **the church is God's people who come together to carry out his mission. It is not a building.**

What then does it mean to "Be the church"? What does the church in action look like?

- 1. The church is born again followers of Jesus, committed to sharing the transforming message of Jesus in every way possible.**

This is the church in action. The church in action is when small groups gather in homes and coffee shops. It is when we befriend someone at the gym. It's when we take time to pray for our co-worker. It's leading a Christian group in school.

**When we leave here this morning the church leaves the building and becomes the church in action throughout the week**, infiltrating our region with the power and sweet aroma of Jesus.

Then next Sunday the church comes back together in what we call the church building. Some groups use the term "meeting house" to describe their building.

Jesus is committed to his church - to his followers – where ever they meet. Buildings are helpful in helping us carry out our mission of reaching people and making disciples of them. **But the church is made up of followers of Jesus.**

Some people like bashing the church and saying it has become irrelevant. But the church of Jesus Christ is alive and well. Yes, there is a lukewarm compromising part of the church, but the church as a whole, is strong, vibrant and sold out to Jesus.

□ *World Christian Encyclopedia* cited that Christianity is the largest religion in the world and ranks at first place in net gains through religious conversion.

□ *Islam is also growing rapidly* through their high birth rate but not by people converting to Islam. Studies estimate significantly more people have converted from Islam to Christianity in the 21st century than at any other point in Islamic history.

### **Abbas (Tex) Hameed testimony...**

The center of Christianity has shifted from the US and Europe to the global South and East. In the last century, Christianity in Asia grew at twice the rate of the population.

The reality is - Jesus is building his church. The church of Jesus Christ is growing in strength. His kingdom is increasing in the earth and the gates of hell cannot stop it.

Going back to our text – Peter continues to define the church.

*Vs. 9 .....You are a chosen people. – We are not just a random group of people. We have been chosen and called out to follow him.*

## **2. The church is people who have responded to God’s call to be his chosen.**

God has chosen us and called us out of darkness. He has called us out of our former way of living into a new way of life and obedience to him.

**One of the descriptive names given to us as the church is that of being a “bride”.**

It’s a very special thing when a young man chooses his bride and she responds with a Yes.

In salvation God is the initiator. He pursues us. He asks us to be his. ***We love him because he first loved us.*** He has proposed to the world and awaits our response.

I pursued my wife, Erma. Of all the girls I chose her. I remember we dated a bit and then decided to give the relationship some space. I needed to know for sure. During this time Erma went to live in New York City for a while. I soon realized I didn't want to do life without her. I wanted to experience life with her and pursue God's call together. So, soon after she got back I proposed to her. I asked her to be mine.

- We were two poor missionaries at the time and I didn't have money to give her a ring. In fact, the rings we eventually got were given to us by the local bar owner who found out we were engaged. **And no – we weren't his customers. Just friendly neighbors.**

**Listen, part of your identity this morning is that God said, “I want you to be mine”. “I choose you.”** He called you out and away from your other pursuers to be his.

**Peter says we are God's special possession.** He says there was a time we were nobody special. – *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God;*

- You are his. You belong. You are wanted and cherished. WOW
- The world is looking for this kind of love and belonging – Our identity!

### **3. The church is people who understand their priestly responsibility as members of the royal family.**

*1Peter 2:9 .....you are - a royal priesthood.*

We all have been given the responsibility of a priest which is to represent God to people and to intercede and help people connect to God. That is the role of the church – God's people. That's what it means to “Be the church.”

One of the things I appreciate from our **anabaptist heritage** is that they removed the barrier between clergy and laity. While respecting the roles of leadership they said everyone is a priest in the New Testament. In other words, anyone can lead someone to Christ. Anyone can pray for the sick. **We are all priests.**

Here at Petra, we have lay people serving on our prayer ministry teams, leading worship, leading life groups and prayer groups, serving as regional care ministers, visiting people in the hospital, people doing the work of ministry with children and youth, and all of us serving as Christ's ambassadors in our communities.

- **We are a royal priesthood in action. We don't need a title or position.**

#### **4. The church is a nation without borders, consisting of followers of Jesus worldwide.**

*1Peter 2:9 .... you are - a holy nation.*

The church is an extension of God's kingdom. It is the channel through which God's kingdom operates on earth. We are a nation with no borders.

We need to be careful that we don't marry the church with nationalism. America is not the kingdom of God. The church must remain above national politics.

We respect and pray for our leaders and participate where we can as good citizens, but we have a higher allegiance to a king whose name is Jesus.

I love the international flavor of the church. At our Hopewell Conference leaders gather from India, Thailand, Haiti, Mexico, Kenya, Ghana, Costa Rico, Colombia.

The church of Jesus is beautiful.

#### **5. The church is people who understand and give mercy.**

*1Peter 2:10 ... once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Sadly, the church is seen by many as being more judgmental than merciful.

As Christians we are to judge between right and wrong. We are to call sin -sin and not water it down.

But there is a big difference between clearly defining sin and in being judgmental toward people.

We are called to extend mercy and forgiveness.

Peter reminds us that we were all sinners deserving of God's judgement but who receive mercy instead.

We all were equally guilty, lost and sinful in God's sight. It took just as much of God's mercy to save you and me as it did the worst of sinners.

The church should be known as a people who unapologetically uphold the righteous standard of God's word and at the same time are full of mercy and grace to those entangled in their sin.

### **Conclusion:**

**God has been sensitizing us as a church** toward those who are caught up in addictions and have made poor choices. **He is increasing our compassion** toward those who didn't come from stable homes with loving parents who taught them responsibility and biblical values.

**In other words, he is teaching us how to be the church. Which is another way of saying - how to be Jesus to people.**

### **Application and Challenge:**

- Befriend and come along side someone this week like Jesus would.
- This week forgive someone who has hurt you like Jesus would.
- Show compassion to someone this week like Jesus would.
- Find someone this week who needs a Jesus touch and love them like Jesus would.
- Pray for someone this week like Jesus would.

**Let's be the church this week where ever we go and to whoever we meet.**