

# Sunday Sep 12 2021

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church, people, jesus, god, called, peter, darkness, pray, world, means, chosen, life, joy, friends, identity, broken, possession, holy nation, lord, writing

## SPEAKERS

Ethan

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Ethan 00:01

You're listening to audio from union church, a new church in Livingston County, Michigan. If you'd like to learn more about our church or donate to this ministry, please visit [unionchurchmi.com](http://unionchurchmi.com). Well, my name is Ethan. I'm one of the pastors here at Union church. And I am humbled and thrilled that you're gathering here with us, especially if this is your first time gathering with us. You're here for a big Sunday. It's, it's our launch Sunday. We've been praying, and planning and preparing for almost three years for this day. In the fall of 2018, my family and I felt really clearly God calling us to plant a new church in the area where I grew up. And then really quickly after that call came to us. And the Lord started to stir up pastor Kyle and his wife, Ashley, and they came on board. And so three years we've been planning and preparing and praying that God would plant a church through us here in Livingston County. And then since last January, for the past nine months, we've been here on the ground kind of building relationships with people. So that group of people that has been praying towards this day has grown, there's a whole team of people who have designed signage and helped set up and tear down and, and ran sound and created curriculum for your kids and who are serving your kids now, and they all have been praying and planning and preparing toward this day. And so I just want you to know, that you, if this is your first day here, you have been prayed for you have been prayed for that the Lord would meet with you here today. And if that that thumbnail sketch of our history is new to you, if you'd like to hear more, I'd love to sit down some time and, and tell you the whole story of how God called us to plant a church here. But today just feels kind of thick with goodness. And you are a part of that good gift from God. And so thank you, thank you for being here. You can grab your Bible, we are going to turn to the book of First Peter. And if you don't have a Bible, like pastor Carl said in the beginning, you can grab one of the black hardback Bibles there in the back. If you don't own a Bible, we would love to give you a Bible. Because we love the Bible. And we have some set aside to give to you. And so head over to the connection station at the at the end of the time. And we would give love to give you that gift. We want to be saturated in the scriptures. And so when we gather, we always engage with God's word as we sing. And as we pray, and especially as we come to the sermon. Like I said, we're going to be in the book of First Peter, First Peter is in the New Testament. So it's on the right half of your Bible, it's kind of towards the back cover. If you have one of the black hardback Bibles, it's on page 1014 1014. And as you turn there, before I say anything else about where we're going and, and what I have to say today, I want to let God speak to us through His Word. So I'm going to pray. And then we will read from First Peter. Pray with me. God, you are mighty, you are beautiful. You are good. And you've shown us all these things and more about yourself in this book. And so as we open up the scriptures today, we're asking for your help. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with gratitude, stir our affections for you. Help our hearts to find rest before you this morning. Help us to comprehend a little more of the measurable glory of Christ. renew our minds with the truth of the gospel and transform us through it. We pray, Holy Spirit, I ask that you would help me I am weak to preach your word on my own. So I submit myself to you. And I ask that you'd

let your strength shine forth through my weakness I pray that you take the glory Lord, it belongs to you. It is yours and yours alone. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. So first Peter two verses nine and 10. I'm gonna read the passage and then when I'm done reading, I'm gonna say this is the word of the Lord. Because that's what we believe that this is God's Word to us and then you're gonna respond to me. Thanks be to God because we want to cultivate gratitude for God's word. So first Peter two verses nine and 10 say this: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, holy nation of people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So I don't know how this works in your house, but my wife and I have developed a system for any time we buy anything that requires assembly in our home, in the system goes like this, I put it in the car, and I drive it home. And I carry it into the house. And I hand it to my bride. And I say here, baby, have fun. And I take the kids out of the room. And it's because my wife, Dana is this beautiful, talented weirdo who loves instruction manuals, and I am not, I am the opposite of that. I just like I kind of like guesswork my way through it. And inevitably, that guesswork of trying to figure out how things work together what these individual pieces mean, they just lead me to frustration, and I just get angry. Really, honestly, I sometimes throw things across the room. I've you know, had bruised knuckles, i have i've been injured, I've been out some money from damaging something that I've purchased. And now I have to buy again, because I've broken it. And it's all because I'm ignorant, you know, willfully ignorant of the identity and the purpose of the things that I'm trying to fit together. Right. And I know you engineers are saying why don't you just read the instruction manual. My father was right there. He's an engineer. And he said, Come on dummy. And it's true. But they're so boring. And that's just my own brokenness. You just got to bear with me, I'm trying to get better. But knowing things' identity, knowing things' purpose, knowing how they're meant to fit together is important, right? We end up misusing things, when we don't understand what they're designed to be. And we often damage them, or we become angry with them when we expect them to function in a way that, that they aren't designed to function, right? If I would just look at the way the maker has designed the thing to come together, I could save myself so much grief. And I think the same is true, as we think about what it means to follow Jesus and be a part of his church. That's part of what Peter has in mind as he's writing the book of First Peter. So Peter was one of the original 12 disciples, He followed Jesus for three years and and after Jesus died and rose again and ascended to heaven, Peter became a leader in the early church. And so he's writing this book of First Peter, it's actually a letter that's meant to be circulated to a group of churches in a region called Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. So it wasn't written to just one group, it was written, it was meant to be written to toward toward a church and then passed on to another church and passed on to another church, all in this region. And Peter is writing to a group of Christians in Asia Minor, who were who were hard pressed people. They were enduring suffering. Some of them were persecuted for their faith. Some of them were probably refugees, who'd fled even heavier persecution to find safety, for because of their faith in Jesus. And so they were just this uncomfortable minority of people in a vast empire, that rejected Jesus, just the empire of unbelief all around them. And so Peter writes this letter out of a concern that their circumstances might give them a case of spiritual amnesia, that he's worried that they might be so discouraged by their suffering, that they would forget their identity as God's people and in forgetting their identity and their purpose as God's people that they would start to misuse and abuse and cause damage to or become disenfranchised with their faith, what it means to follow Jesus and be a part of his church. And so he writes a letter to help them remember. And this is why we're starting here at the launch of Union Church with a series simply called "Church" because we are on the first Sunday of this new church, but I worry that most, most our country for sure, maybe any of us here, are in danger of forgetting who we are and what it means to really follow Jesus as a member of his church. Because we are in much different circumstances than, than the Christians that Peter originally wrote to, but like them, we are so prone to forget our identity, to forget the design that God has put into his people. Too many people in our region in the West think about being a Christian as if it was just a service to attend. We treat our churches like their one option on a spiritual buffet will say, "I'm not being fed here. So I might as well head over here and see if they are giving me what I want to receive." I like to say that, that sometimes people treat the Lord and treat churches just kind of one branch of their busy tree that encompasses their whole life. So one branch is, is following Jesus and going to church and another branch is heading to yoga and another branch is, is getting to your kids soccer game. But it's more than that. When we think of church and spirituality in terms of platform, and we turn Christianity into something that's only as good as its influencers, or we think in terms of community and building relationships, which is a good thing, but it's not the

ultimate thing. Or we think in terms of a theology, like coming together as the church is some sort of theological, doctrinal exercise, which is also a good thing. But it's not the whole picture. We think about churches being some sort of organization for the betterment of society, like it's a, like it's a charitable nonprofit, that's meant only to kind of treat social ills of our community, which is also true, but it's not the whole picture. And one of the reasons My heart has been provoked to plant a new church is because there are so many people who I love, who I grew up with, who have the same opportunities for spiritual growth as me who have left the church. Or, or they say, I love I love Jesus, but I'm not interested in the church, or they kind of live life with this kind of ambiguous, like, maybe there's a God, maybe there's not I just try to be a good person. And if that's you in any way, I'm not saying those things to condemn you, but my heart is for you. I just have a burden to ask you. Could it be that the people inside and outside the church have forgotten or have not been taught the true identity and purpose of God's people? And could it be that you're frustrated or wounded by the church, not because God has handed you a flawed product, but because the identity and the purpose of the church has been forgotten, and strayed away from? And that's why First Peter, or that's why Peter? What am I trying to say? That's why the book of First Peter is where we're starting and First Peter to because these two verses that we just read, are thick with truth about what God has made the church to be. And so as we dig in, I think we'll find something worth fighting for, friends. Because the church is more than a social club. And it's more than an influence platform. And it's more than a Community Action Group, or a theological study. The church is a people called out of darkness, into God's purposes, for the glory of God, and for our joy. I'm gonna say that one more time, because if you're a note taker, that's the main point: the church is a people called out of darkness, into God's purposes, for God's glory, and for our joy. So let's look again at first Peter. Throughout this letter, Peter is reminding the church of their true identity, you should sit down and read the whole letter of First Peter, sometime, it's beautiful. But here in verses nine and 10, it's like Peter takes all of the goodness of what he's been communicating. And he condenses it down into these two verses. So look at the first two words of verse nine. "But you"... I know, it's mind blowing, "but you." There's, there's, there's something there because Peter has been just before this verse he's been writing about those who have rejected Jesus. So he's saying, but you, you stand in contrast to those who reject Jesus. You stand in contrast to those who persecute you. You have a different identity than this world of unbelief in which you live. And what is it that makes this church stand out? Well, Peter gives a list of things that make the church stand in contrast to the world. He says, You're a chosen race, you're a royal priesthood, you're a holy nation, of people for his own possession. But there's one core identifier, there's one source, that is the root of all the rest. We can't be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people for God's possession, unless one thing happens, and that is that God does something in the heart of a person. God calls a person out of darkness. And this is the foundation of what followed Jesus and be a part of his church, that you've been called out of darkness that there's this, there's this account of Jesus in the book of John. And Jesus has a friend named Lazarus, Lazarus gets sick, and he dies. And Jesus comes to the family four days after Lazarus dies. And he says to the family, after he weeps with them, he says, Let's go to the tomb. And when they get to the tomb, he says, Take away the stone from the tomb. They said, he's been dead for four days, it's gonna stink, he said, "eh, eh, obey me." That's the Ethan Ezikian translation: "Eh, eh." Like that. And he stood in front of the tomb, where the dead man was lying. And he said, Lazarus, come out. And the man who had been dead came out alive. And that is a true story. That is also a picture of what goes on in our hearts, when Jesus calls us to himself. Friends, if you're a Christian this morning, that is what happened to you, you were dead in your sin. You were following the course of this world, you were living in disobedience to God, you were a slave to your own sinful desires. By your very nature, you were rebellious to God, you inherited this rebellion from your parents who inherited it from their parents who inherited from their parents all the way back. It comes as a part of you, a rebel, born as an enemy to God. But God, being rich in mercy, called you out of darkness, Jesus stood before the tomb of your life. And he said, Come out. And your spirit obeyed Him. And this is the very root of why the church exists. It's because Jesus has called people out of darkness from death, to life and from dark to light. And this means that it's not a family you're born into, that makes you a Christian, it's not a country that you're born in. That makes you a Christian. It's not your cultural background. It's not where you fall on the political spectrum. That makes you a follower of Jesus. It's not the traditions that you've been a part of. It's not the services that you attended. It's not even your good behavior, like like, I'm a good person. And so that makes me a Christian. No, it is whether or not Jesus has awakened your heart from death to life, if it's whether or not he's brought you from from deadness to him to awareness of him, if he's brought you from indifference or hatred toward him towards toward affection to him, has he caused you to see your sin and to repent of it and to confess your need for

him has he opened your eyes to see how you need a Savior? How you need him to be your leader? How you need him to be your friend. And this is what it means to be called out of darkness into His marvelous light before anything else. Before anything else. The church is a people who are called out of darkness. And so this should give us pause. This is an opportunity to examine our own hearts today. It's an opportunity for you to consider whether or not this has truly happened in you. Because maybe you've attended church services for years, maybe if someone were to ask you. Well, if I'm pressed, of course, yeah, I'd call myself a Christian. But you need to see you're not really a Christian. You're not you're not truly a part of his church, because you Haven't been called out of darkness you haven't seen and confessed your great need for Jesus to save you, you trust in yourself. You want to leave yourself, you don't want anybody else to be in charge of you. You haven't submitted your whole life to Him. And if that's something you recognize in yourself, friends, that's not that's not an occasion to despair, it's an opportunity to rejoice because the Holy Spirit is working in you, gently calling you to himself, opening your eyes to see your need. This is an opportunity for you to finally respond to the call of Jesus as He stands in front of the tomb of your heart saying come out. It's the kindness of God to expose the lie that you are living. If you call yourself a Christian, but have not truly been called out of darkness, through an encounter with Jesus Christ, it's an opportunity to find life in him. This is the very root of why the church exists, because Jesus has called individuals from darkness to light. And when he calls individuals from darkness, to light and from death to life, he calls them into something, he calls them into his purposes. So look back at our passage, and First Peter to because he's called you out of darkness, you stand in contrast with the world as and then we encounter this list, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, of people for his own possession. And then if you skip to the beginning of verse 10, you find my favorite words in this little passage. Once you were not a people, but now, you are God's people. And so notice the corporate language here. follower of Jesus, you are not just a chosen person, you are part of a chosen race. You're not just a royal priest, you're part of a priesthood. You're not only washed in the blood of Christ and made holy as an individual, you are part of a holy nation. And when God calls a person out of darkness, he calls them into a people group. He is building a new humanity, but there is a corporate nature to to what God is doing in his church, there is a corporate nature to following Jesus. And this means friends, that there is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity. You need to hear this, when God called you out of darkness and brought you into His kingdom, he made a new creation out of you. That's what the Scriptures tell us. And he made a new creation out of you designed for life within the church family. And I've heard so many people say, Well, I can serve Jesus and love Jesus and not be a part of the church. And listen, when you say that, you are using the language of modern Western individualism. You are not using the language of biblical Christianity. To be a Christian is not just me and God. To be a Christian is is me, and God, and the church. And that's not to say that the church saves you. Only Jesus saves you. Only faith in Jesus saves you. But now, because Jesus has made a new creation in you, if you remove yourself from the communal life of the church, you're like me, you're kind of guessing how the pieces of this life fit together, and you're really causing damage. You're misusing and breaking something. You are You are denying a core part of your identity as a follower of Christ. And that should resonate with us right because that is like the cardinal sin in our world today. We cannot deny a core part of our identity. But you are if you're not part of the the people of God, the gathered church, then you are denying a core part of who God has made you to be as a new creation in His Kingdom. We are individuals called into a people group that's called the church. So you Need the church. And when we are called into the church, we are oriented as God's people around God's purposes. So every role listed here chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation of people for his own possession, each one has significance. Each one is pregnant with meaning. And they're all coming out of language that the Old Testament used to talk about the nation of Israel. You see, Israel was more than just an earthly nation. The people of Israel were this tangible, visible expression of God's promise to take the wreckage of this fallen, sin filled, broken world and redeem it through a new humanity. God has promised to his people since the beginning of sin, he's promised to his people, that there would be victory over Satan and sin and death. And how would that victory come through the offspring of Eve, and then he gives further promises to Abraham. He says to Abraham out of you, I'm going to make a nation that blesses the world and out of this nation from this nation will come the thing that will bring healing and redemption to this broken world. And friends, do you remember what we sang this morning? To fulfill the law and profits? To a virgin, came the word Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises of God, every promise of God finds its yes and Amen. In Him He is the ultimate offspring of Eve, and from him has come a new nation that would bless the world and that nation, friends is us, the church so the Church of Jesus Christ is a chosen race. Deuteronomy seven says about the nation of Israel that that is us as well the Lord your God has chosen you to be a



people for his treasured possession. He chose you out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. And that should make you feel precious. Loved, special. But why is he chosen you? Deuteronomy goes on to say it was not because you were more in number one more beautiful, or had more potential than any other people, that the Lord sent his love on you and chose you. So God has chosen us. We are a people precious to him, not because of any merit or potential that we bring, but because simply he has set his love on us. He loves us Why? Because he loves us. He is in eternal God and from eternity pass through eternity future, he has set his love on us and out of the overflow of His love. He is making a new humanity in this church, the church of Jesus Christ is a chosen race. The Church of Jesus Christ is also a royal priesthood. When you are called out of darkness into His marvelous light, you are brought into a family. And it's God's family. And God is king over all of creation, which means you are part of a royal family. And so that means that part of your identity as a member of God's royal family is to represent the king to the world. Just like pastor Kyle taught the kids this morning, we are made in His image to represent him to the world. We are a royal priesthood. priests are the people who are called qualified and called to come before God in worship. So not only do we represent our king, to the world, we are part of a priesthood that has been qualified to come before God. in worship. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to be holy, means to be set apart for God. God has set his people apart for his purposes. So the blood of Christ takes people from every tribe and every language in every tongue, and he binds them together as citizens of a new kingdom, a new unshakable Kingdom under the king who is Jesus Christ. And so that means that the church when we gather here on Sunday mornings, as we establish ourselves as a local church, what we are doing is, is establishing a new embassy for a foreign kingdom. The church is an Embassy of the kingdom And the king of the kingdom is God, we are citizens of his kingdom. And the Church of Jesus Christ is a people for God's own possession, we belong to Him. And this is our greatest comfort, in life and in death, that we are not our own, but belong to God. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people, God has taken our nothing. And he's made something in us and through us by His great mercy, and though we don't, don't deserve relationship with him, but we don't deserve to be near him. Though we deserve separation from him because of our sin, He has paid our debt, he has brought us near he has purchased us by the blood of Jesus. And this is the most secure the most safe, the most restful place that we could ever be, to be a people of God's possession. This is the identity of the church that we show easily forget that we are individuals called out of darkness into a people group to be a chosen race and a royal priesthood and a holy nation to live as a people who belong to God. So the church is more friends, the church is more than a place to get our spiritual needs met. And yet, so many of us come with a posture that says, Come on. Let me receive me. Don't like this one. Come? No, it's not No, you're coming. You're it's happening at the wrong time. I'm not coming over here. Come on. No. So many of us come with this posture that says I'm here for what you can give me. And that is not what the church is for. It's actually more than a place to build friendships. It's not less than but it is more than a set of doctrines. The church is more than a charitable organization. It's a people called out of darkness into God's purposes. And is the church flawed? Yes. Is the church full of broken systems? Yeah, because it's full of broken and sinful people and broken sinful people build broken sinful systems. Has the church hurt many people with a heavy heart? I say, yeah, it has. The church is a flawed bride, but it is the bride of Jesus Christ. And this is the beauty of the gospel because of Jesus. When you're called out of darkness, you are given a change in status. So the Lord calls you from death to life. And that means in that moment, you are covered in the blood of Christ. And that means that God sees you as holy. Now you know your life. I know my life, I am not holy. And yet that is how God sees me. And the promise of the gospel is that one day, I will really be what God sees me to be in Jesus. Okay. And the same is true in God's people in the church. We are a chosen race, a holy nation of people for his own possession, a royal priesthood. That is how God sees his people, because of Jesus. And the promise of the gospel is that though the church is flawed, and broken, and that there's so much to grieve within the church, the church will one day be in reality, what Jesus has made it to be. And And though we are given many reminders of this in between stage that we're in many reminders too long for Jesus to finish the work that he started in us. many opportunities to ask for Jesus to take away what's been ugly and immature and disappointing or unjust in the church, we can be sure that there will be justice, that that which is broken will be remedied and restored and redeemed. And I'm going to reveal my nerdiness to you for a moment. Because when I think about this, I can't help but think of what a great philosopher named samwise gamgee photo Frodo says, I can't do this, Sam. He is so burdened by the brokenness around him. He is so weary. And Sam says to Frodo, I know it's all wrong. By writes, we shouldn't even be here, but we are. Anybody ever feel that way? When you think about God's people? Sam goes on to say it's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered.

Now, I'm really showing you my nerdiness because I'm crying. As I quote The Lord of the Rings. The stories are full of darkness in danger. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end, because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened. But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow, even darkness but must pass a new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. Those were the stories that meant something even if you were too small to understand why. But I think Mr. Frodo I do understand. I now know. Folk in these stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't. Because they were holding on to something. Frodo asked, what are they holding on to Sam. And Sam says that there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for. And some of you are exhausted. Some of you feel like there is nothing to hold on to in the church. But there is good in the church. And it's not a goodness, that's there because of you or me, because the sins of people like us are what make the church a broken place. But there is good in the church. And that goodness is tied to the one who calls us out of darkness, and the one who makes us into a chosen race, and gives us the identity of a royal priesthood, and cause us to be a holy nation of people for his own possession. It's a goodness that's there, because Jesus has set his love on his church, and we hold on to the church, because Jesus holds on to the church and because of Jesus, and his promise, there is good in the church, and it's worth fighting for friends. So just one more thing. As I kind of land the plane, God does all of this. He calls us into this life of following him and being a part of his people. He gives us new life as God's called out people, not so that we can grit our teeth, and white knuckle our way through the rest of life. He calls us into His church for our joy friends. And if you don't believe me, let's look at passage one more time. There's this an ultimate purpose written here. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people for his own possession, that that is a very important word. We can expand it and say so that you are all of these things. So that so that was so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. So why is God called you out of darkness, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you? And you say, Well, that doesn't have anything to do with my joy. What are you talking about? Is every everything to do with your joy. You have been designed to delight in excellent things. And we experienced this in everyday life. And that's why we delight in beautiful music. That's why we take joy in amazing food. We can't shut our mouths about about that athletic experience athletic performance. We spend our lives chasing excellent things. Excellent things are what make up our picture of the good life that that we so often long for and yet all of these little delights, will peter out and disappoint you and fall short. They will fail you if they terminate on themselves because our delight in these little things is meant to point point us towards delight in something greater. Our delight in these little gifts is meant to roll up and fuel our joy in the fountain Of all excellence in God Almighty. And because God has called his people out of darkness into His marvelous light, we can now see the most excellent set thing we can revel in the glory of God has called us out of darkness and made us into His church. And it is there in reveling in the glory of God and proclaiming his unending excellencies as his people in the world that we will find unending joy, I promise you, friends. This is the church of people called out of darkness, into God's purposes, for God's glory and for our joy. And oh, oh, that we would wake up to the beauty of what Jesus is doing in his church. Oh, that the Lord would allow union church to be a vibrant and joy filled Embassy of this new people that God is building, for the glory of his name and for the joy of all peoples. Let's pray. Jesus, our Savior, a king, a friend. We thank you that in your great mercy you have called us. He stood at the tomb of our lives and called us from death to life. Pray that you do it again, Lord. Pray over these people. Just ask that if anybody is here, who does not know you has not truly been called to your light, that they would open you and open up their eyes to see just beg you that you would save Jesus. We beg you that you would stir up hearts that are weary and wounded and disenfranchised and cynical that you would bring healing we pray that you do it so that you would build your church to be a beautiful embassy for your kingdom. God we pray that for all of all of our brothers and sisters gathering throughout the world I think about the churches here in our community 242 church and Cornerstone church and an alive Family Church and anchor church and how and and tri lakes Baptist Church in Brighton and grum wa sallam many more the wells Community Bible we praise You for these gospel outposts. We pray that you would be forming your people there. And we ask that you would do the same here. Make us a people who, who just take joy in in proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into your marvelous light. Bring us to repentance. Bring us to wholeness in you. We asked in Jesus name Amen.