

Message Notes September 20th, 2020
The Good and Beautiful Community Week 2: The Peculiar Community
(1 Peter 2:9; Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 4:7-12)

- **Be Weird**

- Have you ever spent time in a different culture from your own? Maybe, another part of our country, or better yet, another part of the world? When you go to a different culture, people do *weird* things: they eat different foods (or the same foods *differently*), they speak different language (or the same language *differently*), they wear different clothes, listen to different music, do things in a different way, and it's... *weird*.
 - There are a few families at Trinity who moved to Danville from different countries and I'm sure there have been a few times they've looked at how we do things in Pennsylvania and thought, "*that's different.*"
 - I had the privilege of spending the entire spring semester of my junior year in Thailand, which is a small, wonderful country in Southeast Asia. The people and culture were wonderful, the food was wonderful, the natural scenery was wonderful. But I *saw some weird things*.
 - They have their own very distinct style of food, but as they've begun to incorporate Western and American food into their economy, they do it *differently*. For one thing, did you know that people in Asia *don't like cheese*? So, you could find Pizza Huts in Thailand, but believe it or not, Thai people put *ketchup* on top of their pizza to cover up the cheese flavor—*it was weird!*
 - And I went there expecting to find chopsticks at the tables, but actually for the last century or so they've used forks and spoons—but here's the thing: they still prepare their food, like many east Asian cultures, in bit-sized portions, so you don't need a knife. You just get a fork and a big spoon, and all they used the fork for was to shovel the food onto the spoon so you could eat it.
 - Even *weirder*: whether you ate at someone's dining room or a restaurant, they didn't use napkins or paper towels at the table. *They had a roll of toilet paper sitting on the table*. You just tore off a square of T.P. to...wipe your face... *Weird!*
 - The reason they used toilet paper at the *dinner table* was because they didn't prefer to use toilet paper in the bathroom—their bathrooms had those hose thingies for you to use. But this was the strangest thing about their bathrooms: when you go to public restrooms in many places of Thailand, you learn that in Southeast Asia, they don't prefer the traditional sit-down toilet—the "throne" as I like to call it. They use what's called a "*squatty-potty*," and maybe you can imagine why it's called that. You don't sit...you stand on two flat sections for your shoes and...squat. Yep, it was *weird*. And it took a lot of getting used to. (My quads were pretty strong by the end of the trip though...)
 - But after being there for a little while and getting acclimated, I realized something: they weren't the weird ones. *I was*. I was the outsider, I was the newcomer, I was the one coming from another place bringing *my weird ways* into their normal ways of doing things. To them, this was normal and I was the odd one with different language, different style, different tastes, different ways of using the bathroom!
 - You see, weirdness is a matter of perspective: it's about where you are and who you're with and where you come from.
- Christians, in this world, we're called to *be weird*.

- **The Peculiar Community**

- God said something interesting to His chosen people, the Israelites, something that Peter in the New Testament restated for the Church, the New Covenant people: "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light,*" (1 Pet. 2:9).
 - There is *so much* you could unpack here, but I just want to focus today on "God's special possession." The King James Version translates it, "God's *peculiar* people." God's peculiar people; isn't that cool? God's *unique*, peculiar, strange, weird, chosen, *kingdom community*. A.k.a. "The Church."

- If we're really being who we are called to be, Christians are weird.
- Not in an abrasive, forceful, off-putting kind of way. But in the way the Thai people were weird to me—and the way I was weird to them. *Different*.
- And we're not weird for arbitrary reasons of cultural preference, but because we belong to God's Kingdom and God's culture in a world that is opposed to God's Kingdom and God's culture. The Good and Beautiful Community, at its best, is a refreshingly countercultural community.
- God's holy people are *set-apart*. We're *different*. We're different because when we become a Christian, we're not simply saying, "I believe in 'XYZ,' about God to be true," but we're becoming a *new person* with a *new identity* in Christ living in a *new kingdom* that is not of this world. When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we go under the waters of baptism, we become a part of a community whose citizenship is in *heaven*. Our passport changes, our residency changes: we are now permanent citizens of God's Kingdom and temporary residents of the cultures of this world.
 - And to a world that takes its cultural cues from other sources, the culture of Heaven looks *weird*. Following the teachings of Jesus looks *stands out*.
 - In a culture of self-dependence and narcissism, it looks weird to live for others—to love your neighbor.
 - In a culture of fear and anxiety, it looks weird to not give yourself over to anxiety about tomorrow.
 - In a culture that idolizes sexuality, it looks weird to seek purity and self-control.
 - In a culture that still lives by an eye for an eye, it looks weird to value mercy—it looks weird to bless the person who cuts you off on the road or the person who curses you on Facebook.
 - In a culture that never stops working, it looks weird to set aside a day to worship and rest.
 - In a culture of materialism, it looks weird to place your value in things above.
 - And the list goes on...
- Now, old habits die hard, right? If I moved to Australia, it would take many years for my American accent to fade away in place of an Australian accent (man, that would be cool!).
 - It takes time, usually, to assimilate the new culture of God's Kingdom—in fact, it's a lifelong process—but the fact is, our identity *changes* and our culture *changes* when we become a Christian. It can take time to see this transformation happen. It takes genuine repentance and humility before God; sometimes we really have to surrender and let go of old ways in order to see this transformation, but it happens if we're walking with Jesus.
- **Our Peculiar God**
 - Why are Christians different? Why are Christians peculiar? Because we have a peculiar God.
 - James Bryan Smith writes: *"The God we love and serve is extraordinarily different than the gods humans design. When the Greeks and Romans created their pantheon of gods and goddesses, they looked remarkably like humans—often at their worst. Their gods lied and cheated and murdered...The God that Jesus reveals is peculiar. This God loves humans so much that he became one of them and died for them. This God forgives when it is not deserved. This God is generous, never vengeful. If the God of Jesus displays wrath, it is only because this God is good and loving, and is rightly against sin because it hurts his beloved children. No one could have made this story up. There is nothing like it in all of religious literature. That is because in all of the other religions there is no God like the one Jesus revealed. God's ways are not our ways, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8). God's values are different."*
 - Listen again to 1 John 4, which we read today. This is the core of God's and our peculiarity: *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."*

- If God is love, we are called to be love too. Imagine being a community of people that were truly *centered on* this kind of love. It would be a very peculiar thing in this world.
- **But Are Christians Really Different?**
 - The problem is, how many Christians actually live differently? Are believers in this world really that different from everyone around them? Some recent studies in America have shown that in a lot of categories of common personal struggles, the statistics among Christians aren't that different from the rest of society.
 - Sadly, many people are turned off from the Gospel because they see Christians who don't seem to be any different from the world—or worse, they seem *worse!* But this is partially the point: we're *supposed to be different*, people know it, we know it. We're called to be God's holy, peculiar people.
 - The truth is this: "Christians are not always different, but they ought to be, and often are." (James Bryan Smith).
 - In this week's chapter, James Bryan Smith shared the story of a church he knew of that held a funeral service for a young man who was gay. People from another church came and picketed the service, holding signs that said, "God hates fags." People from the church holding the funeral were shocked and outraged. But even though they were being cursed, they decided to bless: it was a chilly, rainy day, so they brought out trays of hot cocoa to the protestors. How strange.
 - Several months ago during our series on Prayer, we shared the story of a little girl named Ruby Bridges. During the civil rights era, she was one of the first African American students to be integrated into a historically all-white public school in the South. People from the community boycotted the school and showed up every day when she arrived shouting death threats and horrible, hateful things to this little girl. The story later came out from Ruby's counselor who had been assigned to help her get through this time, that while she walked through that crowd every day to get to school, she could be seen talking under her breath. It turned out she was praying for them—praying for the people who hated her. *That's different.*
 - While, at the time, these Christians might not have been appreciated for their "weirdness" by the people who were hating and cursing them, the world looks at stories like this in history and sees something *good and beautiful*. Something attractive. They see something refreshingly strange, like *salt and light*, in world that seems sadly predictable.
 - When we're living *different* as God calls us to be, people are attracted to this difference. And sometimes they persecute us, but sometimes, they're won over by Love—the Love talked about in 1 John 4.
 - Think about your life, and ask yourself this question: *where in my life right now am I blending in when I'm called to be weird?* If you think of something, don't just rely on your will-power. Ask God to help you and show you the way. Jesus is with you, His Spirit is in you. We can do this!
 - Don't blend in. Be different. Be weird. Because God's *weird* is actually the true *normal*. It's just a matter of whether or not you've realized it yet.