

Lent 2016 "Peculiar" 1 Peter 2;9,10 Pastor Michael Schempf

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

How about it? Is that person sitting next to you in the pew today... peculiar? Or are they thinking that the one who's peculiar is you? Does that word describe each of us? Are you peculiar? The reading that 'ye' heard tonight from 1 Peter sounds a bit archaic because it comes from the King James Version, translated in 1611. Language changes over time but the word peculiar, still retains much of its original sense and meaning. The KJV is used today to perk up your ears and make you ask, "what does that word mean, and does it apply to me?" Am I peculiar? The American Heritage Dictionary defines peculiar, in part, as 'unusual, eccentric, strange'. 'Odd' or 'weird' wouldn't be too far off either.

As a follower of Jesus, you are considered peculiar in the negative sense of being unusual, strange, even weird by those who do not believe in Jesus. Unbelievers cannot appreciate a Christian's desire to honor and serve Jesus with their life. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "but a natural man does not accept the things of the spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." And Peter, later in this first letter adds that unbelievers aren't just baffled at your peculiarity. "And in all this they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you." Considering you to be peculiar is putting it mildly. Stronger epithets would be party pooper, square, prude, stuck up, kill joy, goody two shoes, or judgmental. Godly behavior isn't just peculiar, it offends. The peculiar, sanctified life of the Christian raises the ire of those who pursue what Peter calls abominable idolatries. It elicits mockery. Remember "te-bowing"? In his brief NFL career, Tim Tebow's momentary kneeling posture after scoring led to widespread mockery. His godly behavior was spoofed on late night network comedy. The press still loves to mock him whenever he advocates sexual abstinence before marriage. At the very least, you will be thought peculiar, as you seek to live in a God-pleasing way. Being a fool for Christ's sake, considered peculiar as you endeavor to serve Him is part of taking up your cross to follow Jesus.

The other aspect of the word peculiar is this: 'belonging DISTINCTIVELY to a person or place, as in music that is peculiar to the Middle East, or birds that are peculiar to Madagascar.' Peculiar means that which is unique, unlike anything else, not found elsewhere. You ARE peculiar, unique, positively different, because of the relationship you have with Jesus. Like everyone else you and I were no friends of God by birth. "for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." What you once were and what you now are, the change that has moved you from unbeliever to believer,

that's what makes your life distinctive, unique...peculiar. That God has made you a new and different person lays a responsibility on you. So many people are still what you once were. They may not know they are lost. In fact many are quite content and even determined to keep God at a distance. But God reaches out with His love even to the most firmly entrenched unbelievers. His call to repentance and faith extends even to those with hard hearts. Consider St. Paul when he was still Saul. Who opposed the Gospel with greater vigor than he did? Who despised Jesus more than him? When God knocked him from his horse with blindness his conversion was not complete until a peculiar man named Ananias, one who was different than Saul regarding faith in Christ, came and laid hands on him saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Who was Ananias? Just a man who had what Saul did not. We hear nothing more about Ananias. He never became the evangelistic and theological giant that St. Paul would. But when Saul was in darkness Ananias brought him into the light; literally restoring his physical sight and simultaneously opening his spiritual eyes to see and believe Jesus. Not just anyone could do that. He had to be peculiar. He had what Saul didn't have and he didn't withhold his unique, distinctive witness. In contrast, the soldiers travelling with Saul were not peculiar. They were like Saul, unable to lead him to Jesus. It takes the right person, a peculiar person to lead someone groping in darkness into the light.

Or consider this: Though it has received scant attention in the press, in recent years scientists committed to a belief in evolution keep finding major problems with that theory. (surprise, surprise) They have expressed their scientific doubts in writing. Here's a quote from Philip Johnson, retired law professor from U. of CA. Berkeley, and a proponent of intelligent design. He writes, "In 1980 the most prominent American Darwinist, Harvard professor and paleontologist (fossil expert) Stephen Jay Gould, published an article in a professional journal which took dead aim at the standard textbook claim that "all evolution is due to the accumulation of small genetic changes, guided by natural selection, and that transpecific evolution is nothing but an extrapolation and magnification of the events that take place within populations and species." Gould concluded that "the theory as a general proposition, is effectively dead, despite its persistence as textbook orthodoxy." Prominent British biologist, Brian Goodwin, reached a similar conclusion on the basis of his knowledge of embryology. Lynn Margulis, famed for her theory that mitochondria were once independent bacterial cells, regularly challenges scientific colleagues to name a single unambiguous example of the formation of a new species by the accumulation of micromutations. The challenge being unmet, she commented acidly that science will one day judge neo-Darwinism as a 'minor 20th century religious sect.'" These and other prominent, respected evolutionary scientists are leveling broadsides at evolution. But exposing the weaknesses is as far as they can go. They can't help each other to see the truth when they don't have the truth. The blind can't lead the blind. They still defend evolution to the death. The very best they can do is recognize that evolution has unresolvable problems. Their admission that 'this doesn't work' is still a far cry from actually discovering the truth. It would take a 'peculiar' person with insight derived from God's revealed truth to enable them to see clearly the truth about life's origins.

God has called you, says Peter, out of darkness into His marvelous light. You have a distinct, unique perspective; call it peculiar, not just about the earth's origin, God enables you to comprehend the big picture of life. You know how we got here, but you know where you are going as well. You know the purpose and meaning of life because you know the true God. You live to the praise of His glory. You know that even before you were born He had a plan for every day of your life. You know it, because God says so in Psalm 139: "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them." Only peculiar people believe and know that to be true. You are peculiar because you grasp that you are not here by accident. According to His Word, God has a good purpose and plan for every single day of your life that He determined even before you were born.

Peculiar, it's really another way of saying that you are the salt of the earth. St. Peter exhorts you because you are 'peculiar', to let your Gospel light shine where darkness prevails. He has in mind much more than just the darkness that is prevalent and pervasive when God is denied as the Creator. Peter calls on the peculiar people of God in every place and time. He calls you today to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. As God's peculiar people you possess the joy of the Lord because He loves you and has forgiven all your sins. You have experienced His mercy. Are you peculiar? Absolutely! Before this service ends be sure and look at that person sitting next to you. Look them right in the eye and say, "YOU ARE PECULIAR! To which each of you can reply "thank you for telling me, by God's grace it's true... and so are you! I am! You are!... God's unique, distinct, peculiar people. Amen.