

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: Moving Onward Towards Perfection
Sermon: Beginnings in America (1760-1816)

I Peter 1:13-25

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Sermon

Do you remember your days in High School? Do you remember being asked questions on tests and you didn't know the answer? What did you do when that happened? Leave it blank? Make it up? The answer is C! Well, here are actual answers given by High School students to real test questions:

Q: Briefly explain what hard water is. A: Ice

Q: What ended in 1896? A: 1895.

Q: Name the four seasons. A: Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.

Q: What does the word "benign" mean? A: Benign is what you will be after you be eight.

Now my point here is that sometimes people don't know the answers... so we get creative. Some students have even found that the more impressive the answer the more likely others will believe they actually know what they're talking about. That is especially true when it comes to theologians and Bible words. Our word for today is "Sanctification". Turn to your neighbor and say, Sancti-what? Sanctification. For many people, this is a very intimidating Bible word. And there are two reasons for that. First, Theologians have muddied the water by making word like this complicated, and the more complicated their explanations, the more intimidating it becomes for the rest of us. One theologian explained sanctification this way: "In a doctrinal sense, sanctification is the making truly and perfectly holy what was before defiled and sinful. It is a progressive work of divine grace upon the soul justified by the love of Christ. The believer is gradually cleansed from the corruption of his nature, and is at length presented "unspotted before the throne of God" I've always hated stuff like that! I don't know anyone who TALKS like that. I don't even know anyone who THINKS like that.

Now, I'm sure this theologian meant well, but his explanation is way too complicated. It's a \$20 definition to a 50 cent word." Now, let me to let you in on a secret here: The word Sanctification is NOT that complicated. Sanctified simply means: "set apart" or "separated". For example, the people back in the tech area are sanctified... they are separated from the rest of us in the worship area. When I'm up on stage, I'm sanctified... I'm set apart from the rest of you in the room. And while we are all seated in this building, we are sanctified... we are separated from everyone else in Oregon City who aren't here now. Separated and set apart – that's all sanctification means. It is not that hard a word to understand, but it has become intimidating because theologians have made it that way complicated.

The 2nd reason Sanctification seems intimidating to us is because the original Greek/Hebrew words for sanctify are translated so many different ways in the English Scriptures. The Hebrew word for sanctified is "qadash" and the Greek is "hagios" (you don't care and I don't care, but let's put them up on the screen to impress you). When you find those Hebrew/Greek words translated in our English Bibles you'll find that they are translated: "Sanctification"; "Sanctified"; "Consecrated"; "Holy"; "Hallowed" and "Saint". No matter how it's translated though... it's all the same idea. It doesn't matter if we're talking sanctification, consecration, being holy or becoming a Saint - it's all about us being SET APART for God.

First Peter is all about being set apart. Be holy, as God is Holy. Be self-controlled. Purify yourselves. Be born again. This was a time when the saints didn't want to be a part of the culture around them. The culture was not self-controlled. Not purified. Not holy. We use language like "Be in the world, but not of the world." When in Rome, do as the Romans would not have been a good lesson for the new Christians. Even today, we have this belief that a Christian should somehow be above the cares and temptations of this world. Many of you may remember a time when Christian's, or at least some believers, wouldn't dance. Play cards. Drink. Associate with sinners. Do anything on a Sunday. You get the idea. It seems we've watered down a little over the years, I've seen a few of you mow your lawns on the Sabbath. But there's still a sense that Christians should still try and walk the straight and narrow. And when we mess up, Christ is there to bring us back into the fold of 99.

Set apart. That's what got the Methodists going in the first place. For these two months we are exploring a little bit of our Methodist roots. Groups of people who banded together in small groups to see what they could do to "flee the wrath to come." Sounds dark, but in essence, how to find sanctification. Walk in the light. As we said last week, John Wesley and his brother Charles, both Anglican Priests (that's church of England), began this revival movement to bring Christ back into the lives of those who wanted to walk a holier way. And it was all pretty much contained in the Church of England, on the Island of England. The Methodists did their thing, but stayed in, and had their sacraments in, the Church of England.

But there were these colonies. Over in the New World. Places like New York, Maryland, Georgia and others. And soon enough, there were Methodist societies cropping up along the seaboard. John Wesley sent two lay preachers to the Americas in 1769. A few more a couple of years later. The most prominent of these was a young man named Francis Asbury - who grew into one of the most prolific and well traveled preachers in the New World. Asbury would ride over 300,000 miles on horseback and give 16,500 sermon in his career. I am such a slacker. Most small towns didn't have a church, so he organized them. And had traveling preachers do a circuit over a several month period. But in 1776, the landscape changed. The Declaration of Independence. Goodbye, England, hello United States. The colonies wanted to be set apart, sanctified, as it were. And in the end, those loyal to the crown had to either change their allegiances or leave. Around 100,000 left. Most went to Canada, others to places outside the US, like Florida (at the time), and many went back to Great Britain. But in this, the Church of England wasn't really welcome either. The church of England had to part ways as well, or change. America didn't really want the Church of England to hang around. So, they changed their name, and a little bit of their rules. They will now be called the Episcopal Church. Today's American Episcopal Church is a direct descendant of these times. But with all of these Methodists running around without Church of England oversight, or sacraments, or leadership - John Wesley made the tough decision. He believed it best if the

Methodists in America would begin their own denomination. Separate from his oversight and the oversight of any other religious body. John ordained a preacher, Thomas Coke, to go America and start the new denomination. John's brother Charles was mad - he never wanted a new denomination, just a revival of the old. But it was not to happen that way. Thomas Coke came to America, found Francis Asbury and company, and they held a Conference at Christmastime in 1784, Philadelphia, to start the new church for the thousands of Methodists in America. By Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury (who was still a lay preacher), was ordained a deacon. The next day, an Elder, and the following day, a Bishop. Setting an impossible bar for the rest of us preachers. Coke and Asbury. If you're a lifelong Methodist, you might know the name of our publishing house, and smash-up of their names. Coke and Asbury. Cokesbury. There you go. When Asbury got to America, there were 600 Methodists. When he passed away in 1816, there were 214,000 Methodists because of his work, and over 700 preachers. Including the first African American pastors in America.

We are called to be set apart. As a denomination. As a church. And as individuals. Set apart for what, though. We were set apart to receive God's forgiveness, His blessings, His love and His promise of heaven. It sounds like we're God's chosen. His favorite people. But look at how Peter calls it in our text this morning. just as (God) who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be HOLY, because I am holy.'" By God, for God.

We are set apart, to do the work God wants done. We are set apart to serve. That's why we worship. That's why we pray for each other. That's why we take an offering, to change the world in the ways we can. We are set apart to serve. There was a high youth group that I was asked to be in charge of. They were having a hard time keeping the freshmen and sophomores in the group. Turns out, on retreats and mission trips and whatnot, their tradition was that the seniors could order around the younger classmen. Freshman do all the chores, load the vehicles, last in line to meals, etc. While the seniors (who paid their dues years prior), ruled the group. No wonder not a lot of underclassmen stuck around. I changed it up. It wasn't as easy as it sounds. But new rules. Seniors load the bus. Help cook the food. Eat last. Seniors - you are to serve the younger kids. Show them what it means to lead by serving. It took awhile. But soon enough, the retention rate of the younger kids boomed - and the group grew. I hope it stuck with them later. To be a leader means to serve. To be a Christian means to serve. To be a part of a church means to serve. To love God, love others.

This week, give yourself an accounting as to your holiness. How well we serve others. Do we live of the world, or just in the world. These are questions we'd better know the answer to. And the family of God said, AMEN.