

Scripture: Exodus 19:3-6
Message: My Special Treasure
October 8, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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In the 1960's - 70's there was a musical group called The Beatles. Maybe you have heard of them. One interesting tidbit that I have learned about The Beatles is that they paid attention to the lonely, invisible people of society. This is highlighted in two particular songs. One haunting tune is titled "Nowhere Man." The song talks about a "nowhere man who sits in his nowhere land making his nowhere plans for nobody," but the song then asks, "Isn't he a bit like you and me?"

Perhaps the more striking song is "Eleanor Rigby." The lyrics paint a sad vignette of lonely people who live on the isolated margins of the wider world. Eleanor Rigby, we are told, is the caretaker of a country church. Eleanor is the one who picks up the rice after weddings have come and gone. The church's pastor is Father McKenzie, a man who, it is said, writes the words to sermons that no one will hear because "no one comes near." In the end, Eleanor Rigby dies in the church and is buried "along with her name. Nobody came."

The mournful chorus of the song asks, "Ah, look at all the lonely people. Where do they all come from? All the lonely people: where do they all belong?"

In a world of instant connection anywhere, there are a lot of lonely people. In a world where Facebook and Snapchat list all your friends for others to see, there are a lot of lonely people. It's interesting to hear the puzzled response of police as they look into the life of the gunman who killed so many people in Las Vegas. They are intrigued that so few people knew this man and so little can be found out. How many other lonely people sit in front of the video terminals or at the card tables in crowded casinos? Look at all the lonely people.

How many lonely people are sitting in this room this morning? Oh, a lot of us know each other. Or at least some of us know some others. But how well do we know each other? Do we know our hurts, our doubts? Do we know our interests and what thrills us? Do we know more than names and favourite restaurants or sports teams? Or are we lonely, wishing for someone to really care?

When we look at God's Grand Story, we see that God places a strong emphasis on his relationship with his people. We have seen aspects of that relationship in the lives of individuals like Abraham, Joseph, David, and Hezekiah. Sometimes that relationship was

obvious; sometimes it was harder to see. But God was always present, reaching out to his people.

This morning we see how God enters into a relationship with the people of Israel. He calls them his 'treasured possession,' a special treasure. They have a unique identity, compared to all the other nations. Within this relationship, God promises to bless them and he calls them to live in obedience as a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

This idea of being a special treasure is an interesting concept. Something that is special and a treasure usually gets exceptional attention. We saw that in the story of Joseph. Jacob favoured him over his other brothers and gave him special treatment.

You might have a particular item in your possession that you treasure. It might be an old car that you polish and shine and only drive in the summer. It might be an heirloom that is on a shelf where the kids or grandkids can't touch it and possibly break it.

Perhaps your treasure is a unique piece of jewellery that you only wear on very special occasions.

Or your peculiar treasure is your phone because it has all your contacts, all your appointments, and all your photos of memories that are important to you.

Perhaps the most treasured possession in this world are the people that we care for and love. A wife, husband, children, grandchildren, a special friend may be a special treasure. These are the people we will protect, we will guard. These are the people we value highly and will love dearly.

In the same manner, God enters a relationship with his people and calls them his treasured possession. Even if he owns all the mountains and the valleys in this world, yet these are not as special to him as the people that he loves most.

It's important to remember that this relationship is based on the grace of God coming to his people. The people of Israel did not earn their identity as a treasured possession by being such amazing people. Read the previous couple of chapters in Exodus to find out how often they grumbled and complained in the three months after they were came out of Egypt. Even so, God came to them.

That's where it starts. God comes to us, in his grace. God comes and claims his people and promises his blessing. The people respond with a commitment to obey God and honour him in all that they do.

Knowing this amazing love and grace of God, adopting us as his people and his children, inspires a response of thankful dedication. Knowing we belong to God, we are “wholeheartedly willing and ready, from now on, to live for him” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 1). Knowing that God graciously identifies us as his special treasure is not about entitlement or arrogance, as if we are better than others because we are God’s special treasure. This identity is about purpose.

The response to live as God’s people is to live out the identity of a royal priesthood and holy nation. It’s an identity we have through Jesus as our Saviour, as we read in 1 Peter 2:9-10, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God....Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” Once you were a nowhere man or woman. Once you were lonely people who had no place to belong and no one who cares.

Now, in Christ, you are the people of God. Now, in Christ, you are God’s treasured possession, God’s special treasure.

As his treasure, we live as a kingdom of priests and a holy people. A priest was dedicated to God’s service, serving in such a way as to bring reminders of God’s presence into the lives of others. As a holy people, we are set apart to do God’s will. This is not a condition for God’s grace and love. This is an identity we have because of that grace and love.

How are you living as God’s priest and holy people? Do your words and Facebook and Snapchat posts remind others of God’s love? Do they show that you belong to God? Do your conversations build others up and express the patient love of God and the hope of his healing grace? When people see you interacting with your children or grandchildren, do they see and hear love and respect in your voice and in your actions?

Do you surrender or submit to God's Word? Do you allow Christ to take control of your life? Do you let go of a self-centred life in order to be Christ-centred?

We can be good at caring for each other within this body and fellowship. We help each other when we are sick or need a ride. We reach out to those we know. Let’s take that a step further and reach out to those whose name we are not so familiar with. Let’s also get beyond a visit and a ride, and pray with each other. Let’s share our faith with each other. Let’s study God’s Word together, asking questions and learning how God’s truth challenges our lives.

Let's become vulnerable with each other, so that we can share our need for support, admitting that we cannot live our life in Christ by ourselves. It's a relationship of being priests to each other, encouraging each other as holy people, set apart for God's service.

But God's intention for his treasured possession was not that the people would only take care of themselves. Remember that the call to Abraham was that he would be blessed to be a blessing. Joseph was in a leadership position in Egypt and was able to provide food for many people suffering from famine. As God's special treasure, we do not isolate ourselves in our own little circle.

God's Grand Story is one of relationship: God with us; God's people with each other; and God's people being a blessing to those around us.

Look at all the lonely people. They are inside these walls. They are also outside these walls. Be a blessing to our Muslim neighbour, to the non-believing co-worker or friend at the coffee shop, to the lonely people who need a friend. Be open to the Holy Spirit's nudging us to opportunities to be God's presence in the lives of others.

God comes to us that we may be his treasured possession. As you eat and drink, be reminded of your identity in Christ. Be strengthened in the assurance of that identity. Be encouraged to serve and bless and invite others to know the joy and blessing of God's love and grace.

In Jesus, you are God's treasured possession, his special treasure, that you may live confidently as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Share and live the good news.

To God be the glory!

Amen.