

Throughout this series, we've been exploring what it means for us to be a Church of Exiles. "Exiles" is a name Peter gives us in 1 Peter. He was writing to several groups of Christians scattered across the Roman Empire. And these people were not immigrants. They were regular people probably not terribly different from you and me. They probably lived for the most part in the same places they'd been born. Certainly Roman culture was as comfortable for them as American culture is for us.

All that to say, they didn't feel like strangers in their culture, anymore than we do. And then, at the very beginning of his letter, Peter calls them "**the Exiles of the Dispersion... chosen and destined by God the Father... -- 1 Peter 1:1**"

By naming them (and us) Exiles, Peter changes their identity. Without moving them anywhere physically, he transports them out of their old identities (Romans) and into a new identity (Christians). When we read this letter, he does the same for us.

We're not primarily Americans anymore. We're first and foremost Christians. We're strangers in this culture we once called home. We've been uprooted.

Our first week exploring this, we discussed how difficult this transition is to make. We don't tend to think of ourselves first and foremost as Christians. Instead, we treat the Kingdom of God like a Mexican restaurant. Does this sound familiar? When we go to eat Mexican food, we participate in Mexican culture to some degree, but at no point do we forget that we're an American. If you were to go to Mexico, you would feel like a stranger.

When we live as citizens of American culture instead of as Exiles, we treat the Kingdom of God as a foreign country. Church becomes a lot like a trip to the Mexican place down the street. We come together to participate in the Kingdom of God. We worship, we serve, we do what Christians do. But we can do those things without *becoming* a citizen of the Kingdom of God... just like we can eat Mexican food without being Mexican. Our core identity can still be Suburban American even though we participate from time to time in the Kingdom of God – both here at 1850 N Fairfield and at home. We can continue to be shaped by American Suburban values rather than by the Kingdom of God.

That's the conflict we've experienced throughout this series. We know when we gather here that Jesus' way is the way to true life. But it's so hard to follow that Way once we leave here, once we enter back into the daily grind.

That's so hard because we tend only to focus on our conscious Self. [graphic from week 1] This is the self we bring to worship together. It's the Thinking Self, the Self that's easily convinced of the Truth of the Gospel. The Self that knows we're made for more than conforming to the culture around us. The Self that knows we're called to be Exiles. This Self is the mind, it's that conscious part of us, and this is the Self that Churches tend to focus on. We think of Salvation as being convinced of the right truths, of believing the right stuff.

But the Conscious Self isn't the Self that controls most of our actions. We make most of our decisions according to the patterns our culture has already set out for us. We call that deeper, pre-rational Self the Social Self. [graphic from week 1] And that's the Self we need to change. We want to feel at home in the Kingdom of God, comfortable with Kingdom values. And we should

feel like strangers in the American culture around us. But in order for that to be true, we need to live in a different story. We need to be shaped by God's values. Our Social Self needs to experience conversion. [the switch graphic from week 1?]

Conversion away from American values how? Conversion to which Kingdom values? Over and over Peter emphasized the way of Jesus as a radical alternative to the cultural story that shaped his congregations. We've found over this series that Jesus' Way is just as radically different for us today. Our suburban American culture teaches us to be busy all the time, always to be running to the next thing, working harder and longer because our value as people comes from what we produce. Our suburban American culture teaches us to put ourselves first, never to be too vulnerable.

And to these kinds of values, the Kingdom of God offers a radical, revolutionary alternative. [Jonathan's revolution graphic] The way of Jesus is the way of weakness, of vulnerability. And Peter expects us to live that Way in every area of our lives. How do we engage in politics? Not with might makes right. Not with "Not my president" stickers. Not with sloganeering. Peter told us to submit. To honor all the rulers.

How do we engage with bosses we don't like? Not by talking behind their backs. Not by doing the minimum. We submit. We work as though we're working for God. We let our work speak for itself.

How do we live at home? Not by forcing or manipulating everyone else to do what we want. We submit to our spouses and children. We serve. We love. No matter what.

How do we engage in community, with friends? Not by hiding and protecting ourselves. We choose to risk. To give power away to those around us. We choose not to be afraid to look weak in the eyes of those around us.

That is radically different from the way we're taught to carry ourselves in our culture. A people who lives that way is *weird*. They would stick out like a sore thumb. People would give them weird looks and say, "They're not from around here."

And we would smile and say, Well actually, you're right. This place isn't my home. I'm a stranger here. I'm sort of an immigrant, just passing through.

Following the way of Jesus.

In his closing remarks, Peter offers more of the same advice, this time for the whole Church to hear:

"And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly-- not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. In the same way, you younger men must accept the authority of the elders. And all of

you, serve each other in humility, for "God opposes the proud but favors the humble." -- 1 Peter 5:1-5 (NLT)

Hey, you older people? You elders in the Church? You have an obligation to care for the younger among you. As someone who's older, you have a lot of wisdom and experiences to offer these younger persons.

And younger people? You need to submit yourselves to the older persons among you. That's actually the way God set it up. This whole mentoring thing? It was God's idea. You have a lot to learn from the older generation.

That's not how our culture thinks, is it? More often the older generation feels threatened by the younger, up-and-coming generation. We're often a bunch of ungrateful young punks who think we know everything. And the older generation isn't crazy. They didn't just make that attitude up! A lot of us younger people don't honor the older generation. That's a curse of our suburban American culture! New is always better. Gadgets that are a year old are already out of date! Same goes for people!

Peter's same advice is ringing in our ears: stop the generational wars. You older people? It's your *job* to mentor those young up-and-comers. But don't lord it over them. Don't flaunt your experience and wisdom. Don't look down on them when they make dumb mistakes because of the impulsiveness that comes with youth.

And you younger people? Don't assume you know everything! You actually have a lot to learn from the older generation. People aren't like products. Human nature hasn't gotten any significant upgrades in the last several thousand years. You have a *lot* to learn from your elders.

Embrace the way of Jesus. The way of humility, of weakness. That's what Peter goes on to say, his whole thesis for this letter: "Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." -- 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NLT)

This all comes back to that core message our suburban American culture teaches us: pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. No one else is going to watch your back, so you have to take care of yourself. Get yours before someone else takes it. [[the armadillo all by itself from week 3](#)]

Peter says, NO! Don't put yourself first. Don't put all your energies into protecting and watching out for yourself. Instead, humble yourself. Put yourself last and do it in the name of Jesus. Do what Jesus did. Because in doing so, you're placing yourself in God's mighty power.

Not God's average power.

Not God's so-so power.

Not God's capricious, unreliable power that could give out at any moment so put some of your trust but not all because you can't really trust it power.

God's *mighty* power.

Humble yourself. In the MIGHTY power of God. Give all your cares to God. The Message says, Live carefree before God.

Why? Isn't that dangerous? No. Because God cares for you.

Who can take care of you better? You? or God?

Who can take care of you better in the future? You? or God?

Who's got a better idea of what's best for this country? You and your candidate? Or God? (and let's be real – we've figured out by now that they've all been told by God to run, right?)

Who knows better what your marriage needs? You? Your spouse? Or God?

Who can provide for your kids better? Who can give them a better future? You? or God?

Live carefree before God. Because God cares for you.

So will you trust your own abilities, your own power, your own decision-making? Or will you trust that God's way really is a better way?

It's a good question. An important question. For Peter, it's *the* most important question. It's the difference between the Church as Mexican food and the Church as Exiles. Do you *really* trust God to save you? What does your life say?

Are you living like a suburban American or like a Christian?

We want to push back on that. We want to say, Chill out, Peter. This isn't that big a deal. We can do Church on the side without this full conversion. I can live my life according to suburban American values and still love Jesus. You need to calm down.

I can still run myself and my family ragged trying to keep up with all our events and school and commitments and love Jesus. So I'm busy. No big deal.

I can still participate in the absurd circus that is American politics, with all its shaming and name-calling and email-forwarding, and claim I follow Jesus.

I can phone it in at work or school, do just enough to get by and still believe that I set a great example of someone who's totally sold out to Jesus.

I can go days (weeks?) without having a single real conversation with my spouse, without sharing any intimate moments and still have a workable marriage. Still be in a relationship that's pointing us both towards Jesus.

Really? Not according to Peter.

Here's what Peter says:

"Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." -- 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NRS)

This is where it gets weird: Peter says that we have an adversary - the Devil - who's prowling around like a roaring lion. I know what you're thinking - the Devil? Really? Are we going to dress Uncle Sam up in a red tail and pitchfork now? Say that suburban American culture is on par with some sort of latter day Satanism?

No. We're definitely not going to say that. But there's a truth in here we can't miss. If you've chosen to commit your whole Self to follow Jesus, if you have been and are being saved, then you have an adversary.

There's an entity, a force out there that wants you to fail. The devil doesn't want to kill you. That's what we usually think right? Since we all went to see Paranormal Activity 3 this weekend, thanks to our love of horror films and pop theology, we imagine the devil as a fiendish imp hiding behind corners.

When we hit every red light on the way to work, we think, Man, Satan's trying to get me down. I remember growing up it seemed like every time my youth group got together we'd pray that God keep Satan out of our meetings.

As though with all the evils in the world, the Devil's first priority was our little youth group. According to Peter, Satan doesn't want you scared. He doesn't want you angry. He wants you comfortable. Drugged up.

You have an adversary that wants you coasting through your life, living on autopilot. Someone who wants you just to go along with the culture. To feel comfortable. To feel at home in the midst of toxic values. Because then you're worthless. You're safe. You're not a threat to anyone.

That's why Peter tells us to keep alert. The Greek word there actually means sober. As in not drunk. Not drugged up. Think about when you're drunk or high. You're not thinking clearly. You're foggy. You don't make good decisions.

That's what happens when we're too comfortable in our culture. When we don't choose to live as exiles. We get groggy. We don't make clear choices. We can't see clearly to choose the way of Jesus.

And that's all the devil wants. To see us fail. To keep us from fulfilling God's plans for us. We have an adversary who wants Beaver Creek Nazarene to be full of a bunch of happy, drugged-up semi-Christians who aren't making any real difference in our community.

And I know you don't want that. Anymore than I do.

You're here because you want to make a difference. You're here because you want to *be* different. We can. We don't have to be lulled into a false sense of security by the culture around us. We don't have to live like we're drugged up.

Listen to Peter's words. The devil is like a roaring lion. That's not subtle. These aren't quiet ploys that are easy to miss. Earlier this week, when the lions escaped in Zanesville, a friend of mine from Missouri texted me and asked if I'd seen any lions.

I hadn't heard anything about it yet, so I laughed. I thought it was a silly text.

I'm glad we weren't closer to Zanesville. Because I wasn't aware that there were some actual lions out prowling around.

How much longer are we going to live our lives that way? There's a lion out there. Roaring. When you know the way of Jesus, the devil's ploys are obvious.

The truth is, we usually just choose to ignore them. We choose to live like it doesn't matter. But that's foolish. It's foolish to ignore the lion, especially when it's roaring.

We know that running our families ragged isn't good for us. But we pretend like it is.

We know that a healthy sexuality is expressed inside the marriage vows not outside. But we pretend like we can sleep with whomever we want or look at whatever we want without consequences.

We know that the next guy we vote in isn't actually going to change anything, that no vote is worth selling our souls to the cruelty and dissension that characterizes American politics, but when the elephant or donkey march by, we fall in line.

We know that a strong, healthy, flourishing marriage takes work and intention. But we pretend we can give our spouse our leftovers day after day, year after year, with no painful consequences.

We know that a real, strong community takes a conscious decision to be real and vulnerable, but we continue to hide behind our shells.

How different would our lives be if we started living each moment the way we know is right? How different could our homes, our workplaces, our city be if just those of us gathered in this room actually lived like the exiles we are?

Of course there are gray areas. Of course there're some complicated issues. So don't start with those. Start with the glaringly obvious. Start with the roaring lions.

Quit feeding them, expecting that you've got that sin tamed. That's not a kitty cat snuggled up on your lap. It's a lion licking its chops. It's not purring for you. That's a growling stomach, ready to devour you.

You and I both know what we need to do to move forward. To be the kind of Church Peter envisions. He reminds us:

Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." -- 1 Peter 5:9 (NRS)

Resist the devil. Resist those ploys to drug you up and leave you passive. RESIST. Choose to follow Jesus. Choose the hard right.

Choose to engage in those Spiritual practices that lead you to Jesus. Choose to be a student of the scriptures. Choose to be prayerful. Choose to give generously. Choose to fast. Choose to keep Sabbath. Choose these because practices because they are the path to life!

And keep making those good choices. Be steadfast. Don't quit. No matter what.

Because you're not in this alone. There are billions of us. All over the world. All learning to live like Jesus. All resisting the sweet siren song of our cultures. Yes it's hard. That's why we do this together.

What is your next right choice? Because you're going to leave here in a few minutes and have to make that choice. Will it be today when you get home? Tomorrow at work or school? The next time you interact with your parents, spouse or kids?

What is it? And are you willing to do it?

The devil is not subtle. He's a roaring lion. And I don't know about you, but I'm tired of him.

How many more awful campaign commercials and meaningless debates do we have to sit through?

How many more people have to walk in these doors aching for one real and meaningful connection in their week, but leave as empty as they came?

How many more marriages have to watch fall apart?

How many more kids have to grow up with no direction and no support, just a bunch of participation trophies?

How many more days do we have to live on autopilot, numb to the life that's exploding all around us?

How many more before we finally say Enough! I don't *want* to be a part of this culture. I don't *want* this sickness to keep poisoning me and my family! I want something different. I want something better!

How many more before we finally realize we don't belong here?

Brothers and sisters, I say, No More. I say today we choose to be different. I say today we choose the path of the immigrant, the Exile. Today we commit to learn the challenging, countercultural

way of Jesus. The way of the Cross. The way of his radical, life-changing Gospel. Because we believe that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

<reflection time>

**Benediction**

Home is coming.

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself RESTORE, SUPPORT, STRENGTHEN and ESTABLISH you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.” -- 1 Peter 5:10-11 (NRS)