

Last Sunday, we had a very special day. It was special because it had been 200 days since we had our last worship service in our Sanctuary. It was special because we did holy things. We listened to music that is unknown to a majority of Americans. But it moved us to tears. We prayed together. We had Holy Communion, in a way we never had before. But it was a holy act. It was different than what other people were doing that day out in most of the world. It was simply Holy.

Back in June of 2003, I had the great experience of being at a conference in Columbus with a gifted Christian leader named George Barna. We were with him for 8 hours, and they were among the best 8 hours I have ever spent. George Barna is a researcher of American Christian society and American culture. He limits his work to the 48 continental states because he says Hawaii and Alaska are just too different. But 48 states is still a lot to deal with. One of his big studies (and concerns) of the last 30 years has been to see if American Christians are actually any different than the majority of people who do not see themselves as being people of faith. This should make us ask a first question: *Should people who claim to be Christians in this country actually be any different than those who have no interest in the Church or Christian faith?*

Should there be something different about who we are and how we live, and what we model for our children and our neighbors and coworkers? This should not be a hard question. *Can we tell the difference between those who claim to be Christians and those*

who do not? So, that could be question #1. BTW, according to this George Barna fellow, those who claim to be people of God should absolutely be different than those who live a totally secular life. Our Holy Scriptures would absolutely say that we **MUST** be different than the society around us. So question #2 might have us asking *“How are we doing on being different?”* George Barna told us in 2003 that if we went back to 1990, and tracked all the money spent on being the **CHURCH** in America, we would see that we had spent \$80 Billion. He wondered what we had to show for that \$80 billion. Were the Christians actually very different in a way that people could notice?

Hopefully this will be perfectly clear to us, but our words for this day would seem to be instructions for us in how to be different.

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... bear with one another...and forgive each other...clothe yourselves with love...and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.”

OK, let’s explore here. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Are these the normal ways of society, especially these days? Are they the normal ways of the world? Are people naturally good at these things? It continues: bear with one another, forgive each other, clothe yourselves with love. Once again, are these naturally occurring human traits? It would be quite a fine world if these things came naturally to us. But it would seem that they do not.

Finally we are told about living with the peace of Christ, so that it rules our hearts, and, in the one body, the Church of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to live with “the peace of Christ?” We need to at least think about it. And then there is a P.S. here for us: *And be thankful.* I have come to believe that THANKFULNESS usually requires a belief in God and an active connection with God. How can we be thankful without directing that gratitude in some real direction, like to God above? This is not something that humans naturally do. Again, we are told to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, as we are called into the One Body, the Church. Now, does *the peace of Christ* just naturally flow into all human beings? If so, we can save a lot of time and money by not needing churches, right? Of course it does not work that way. So if you had any question before, about whether or not Christians really needed to be different than those beyond the Church, I hope that it is no longer a question. We are called to be Holy, which in its deepest meaning is all about being different, and not just blending in with the ways of the world.

Last Sunday we did something so special, and we saw something so special. We entered a Kairos moment, a piece of time that was different than any other piece of time we had in this week. There was something different and special, and **holy** about what we did. This is not a normal part of daily life. We were blessed to be a part of it. It does not happen all the time. It does happen though, and when it does, we need to be a part of it. It shapes us, it molds us, it heals us and it changes us. It makes us

someone different than we would be without it. This is why it matters for us to remember and keep the Sabbath Day, and to let our lives be shaped by a few hours a week in this place, for all ages, from toddlers to very experienced vintage people!

The Communion Prayer which was offered for us says something different: Speaking about Jesus, I read “He commissioned us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth and to make disciples of all nations, and today his family in all the world is joining at his holy table.” That is talking about a specific subgroup of people. I then said “Renew our communion with your Church throughout the world, and strengthen it in every nation and among every people *to witness faithfully in your name.*”

In both of those pieces of the Great Thanksgiving I mention the same thing: “He commissioned us to be witnesses...” and “among every people to witness faithfully...”

Witnesses. We are called to tell people (and show people) that God is real, to be God’s witnesses. We become witnesses in doing what we are doing right now. If we choose not to do this, our world will grow meaner and more broken. So we must do it, for the world today, and for the world in future days. We are Called to Be Holy. And this does not happen on its own. Thank you for being here today so that this can happen.

In the remaining few weeks we will build on this idea that we are called to be Holy. Are we any different than others who live without connection to God? And maybe more importantly, are we making any kind of a difference? Let’s hope that we have made

differences for goodness. In the name of Jesus we ask this.
AMEN.