

I have heard those being inducted into various sports halls of fame or those receiving an Emmy or Oscar or Grammy, say they are so grateful to now be "in" with the most incredible community of accomplished people they could imagine. And maybe if I were being inducted or receiving an award like that, I might say something similar, but the truth is, there is a most incredible and accomplished community of people to which we can belong that halls of fame and academies don't hold a candle too. Team God! Community of Christ! Hall of Faith! Academy of Spirit and Truth! How do we know this? Peter's post resurrection declaration to the early church of Christ followers and believers.

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," ... "YOU'RE INVITED!!!" "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Why? "In order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

At the heart, Peter's words are "A Special Invitation" from God, for us to be part of the most incredible community of people ever assembled for a purpose, and it is one that is to be embraced and embodied each day. This special invitation from God is a calling to fulfill a divine purpose, and not just individually, but as part of a team. This special invitation from God comes with an injection of a superhero serum of sorts (chosen, royal, holy, priestly- an empowerment and equipping to be able to fulfill God's divine purpose). This special invitation from God welcomes you to a seat at Christ's table to taste and see that the Lord is good. There is no more "A Special Invitation" than that.

This isn't just another envelope in the mail with a stamp that says, "Once in a lifetime opportunity- Act Now!" on the outside. Whatever you do, don't throw this invitation away. This is real and you are going to want to open it and rsvp. Another cool thing is you can invite everyone you know to join you.

Peter's letter is inviting Christ followers and believers all over the globe to lift up the glory of God's mercy and light and live as one of God's own, holy, and beloved. What an invitation huh?

OK, great, they got the invitation way back then, but does the same invitation apply to us here today? In Lynchburg? As First Presbyterian Church? I am glad you asked.

Absolutely it does and here is how.

“YOU’RE INVITED!!!!”

Who: YOU! YOU! YOU! and all those you meet and interact with.
Where: Here. Actually, it can be understood as wherever you are.
When: Now. Actually, it can be understood as whenever you are- every breath, every moment, every day.
What: Belong... believe... celebrate God’s grace... inspire the next generation for Christ... worship joyfully... grow spiritually... love boldly... serve faithfully... love... forgive... be generous... give... commit... lead... trust... have faith... come together... “Go” ... sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs- make a joyful noise... baptize... share...

Here and now, as God’s church, we are each invited to encourage and equip each other, each congregant, to be a faithful disciple of Christ’s will and way. It is an invitation to encourage others toward God, Christ, and the church. Look at it, if you will, as God’s form of church or congregational development. Our special invitation from God calls us, when we have the divine appointments to be together, to work together to be a support, to offer grace, to forgive, to lovingly provoke, to hold accountable.

I want to be a little more specific with what it may look like for us to encourage and equip each other to be a faithful disciple of Christ’s will and way. Let’s remember that Peter is teaching and proclaiming a message to help believers follow Christ for the long haul, throughout life, through the dog days of summer when we can be tempted to fade a way a bit. So, how do we stay true to God and God’s call as chosen, royal, holy, and priestly? We embrace and embody these four Christian responsibilities.

- **Participate** (engage in the life and ministries) ... Participation is key. And by participation, I mean engagement and involvement with what is going on, not simply observation from the seats. Whereas fans and guests enjoying things from the balcony are still a part of the event or community gathered, and balcony seats are great for viewing, it is different when you are on the floor or stage or field. Your awareness is heightened the closer you are to the action. Your emotions are awakened in a way that digs deep within you and not just some goose bumps on the skin from time to time. Your knowledge of what is taking place is enhanced and enriched like you may have never understood things before. Participating and engaging in the life and ministries of the church makes you a player, called upon to act and perform, and the game doesn’t work the same way without you present. So, what if we each bought in and participated in the life and ministries of the church: attend an upcoming concert, visit another congregant and say hello, volunteer to help Vacation Bible School, connect and serve with Presbyterian Women, be an usher or greeter for weekly worship, sign up for Impact Week, volunteer in the office, attend a bible study, serve on a committee, be an Elder, help out with a facilities workday? What is something that motivates you and how can the church be a

part of that with you? What if we participated and engaged in the life and ministries of the church as though it was at the top of our priority list of things to do each week, no excuses (before work, before school, before yard work, before “you name it”)? I’ll tell you what, let’s not leave it as a what if. We have a special invitation from God to participate and engage now.

- **Pray** (connect with God’s will and discern God’s way) ... Active prayer is participation and engagement as well. It is often the most important work we can do as God’s people and God’s church. It helps us be fed the spiritual milk we need. Do we pray? I would say likely. Do we pray often or enough? I certainly know some of you are prayer warriors. What if we each prayed as Paul called “without ceasing”, abiding with God and listening faithfully to the guidance and work of the Holy Spirit before we acted. Like Jesus did before anything important he did. I’ll tell you what, let’s not leave it as a what if. We have a special invitation from God to pray.
- Dig into our **Pockets** (give generously and in trust) ... Times are tough for many. For others, times are different and uncertain. And one of the things we seek to control more in tough, different, and uncertain times is our money. God wants us to partner with God in ministry and the message we get in scripture about money is that it is not only about making the big gift, but it is about making the faithful gift- one from the heart, with passion and trust to what God can do when we all come together. Think of the widow and her two mites praised for giving a meaningful gift for her. Our gifts are not held in comparison with others. So, what if we each gave generously, meaning more than just what we can control and measure as comfortable for us, and entrust our money to God’s mission and way? I’ll tell you what, let’s not leave it as a what if. We have a special invitation from God to dig into our pockets and give.
- **Proclaim** (share with others and invite others to join you) ... More than anything this means being good news. Positive leadership by example has a long-term influential nature word can’t touch. Reminds me of the saying, “Preach often, and when necessary, use words.” As God’s people, we are called and equipped to be witnesses of God’s will and way. Most of us don’t believe that and so we sell it short or redirect it to someone else who does believe it. Listen again! As God’s people, you are called and equipped. You can do it. You have what it takes. Don’t waste the gift God has given you. The most powerful way I think we proclaim God’s good news is by sharing our invitation with others. We extend the invitation for others to join us in our journey. What if we each went out and invited 5 people we know to come experience the joy and growth God is doing in our lives? Do you know a family with children and youth? Invite them to Youth Sunday next Sunday? Do you know a mother or mother figure who could use some love? Invite them to worship next Sunday and they will be showered with love. Do you know someone who wants a different routine, supportive friendship, an opportunity to engage in something bigger than themselves? Invite them to come with you to worship or a bible study or a fellowship dinner? Let’s not leave proclamation as a what if? The time

to proclaim and invite others is now. Don't wait until the fall or for things in life to settle down. We have received a special invitation from God to proclaim God's good news now.

These four responsibilities we have as God's chosen people, royal, and holy, lead us to a need of being fed and strengthened and nurtured. For this, God's special invitation includes encouragement to join Christ at the table- a table that marks each of us as enough and is open for all- a table set for a feast of bountiful love and grace- a table that symbolizes transformation from ordinary to extraordinary- a table that opens our eyes and allows us to taste and see that the Lord is indeed "Good." You are invited!!!! Will you come? Will you join me? Will you join each other?