

November 20, 2011

Sermon Overview:

In her new song “Born This Way”, Lady Gaga celebrates life. The song says, “*Don’t be a drag, just be a queen. Whether you’re broke or evergreen, you’re black, white, beige, chola descent, you’re Lebanese, you’re orient. Whether life’s disabilities left you outcast, bullied, or teased, rejoice and love yourself today, ‘cause baby you were born this way...*” At one level, she is right, we are born in God’s image. On another level, her song celebrates what is not right and normalizes pain and suffering by calling them “good”. How can we celebrate sickness, deformity, disease, and even death? Christianity presents a radical truth: rather than simply accepting suffering and pain, the Bible says it ought not be, but that in Jesus Christ there is the real possibility of being re-born, of being part of God’s restored world where pain and suffering no longer exist. 1 Peter 1:13–2:3 looks at being re-born. The passage describes what the new birth looks like as it changes our thinking, living and loving.

How does the new birth affect our thinking? 1 Peter 1:13–14

Having received new life in Christ our thinking is affected as we set our eyes on the gospel, the truth that there is victory over pain, suffering, sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. There is a coming final victory as God renews his creation and all that is wrong in the world will be made right.

How does the new birth affect our living? 1 Peter 1:15–21

Having received new life in Christ our living is affected as we increasingly become more like Jesus, like the One who has called us. Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44 where God says to Israel: “Be holy, because I am holy.” First, we must ask: “What does it mean that God is holy?” The Bible uses images of light, fire, purity, and beauty to describe the holiness of God. The Bible also tells us that man cannot come near this holy God because of sin. However, for believers, for those who have experienced new birth in Christ, the Bible says we are in fact growing in holiness, daily becoming more like Christ. Secondly, we ask: “What does holy living look like?” Living a holy life is described in the Ten Commandments; it is theology applied. It is honoring God by honoring parents, living honestly, valuing God’s image, protecting life, keeping promises, enjoying and encouraging the gifts that God has given to others. Finally, we wonder: “Has Peter forgotten grace?” The answer is: No. The new birth does not send us back to keeping the law on our own, but animates us to live a holy life. Our new birth is a source of joy because of what God has completed and accomplished on our behalf. Because God has redeemed us from our empty way of living, because our *Holy* God has paid our debt, we now live *wholly* for God.

How does the new birth affect our love for others? 1 Peter 1:22–2:3

Having received the new life that Christ has given us, we can now love others selflessly because our holy God has loved us first. Because God loved us unconditionally, we can love each other with “no strings attached”. We depend on and never give up on each other. We can love other believers well as we stay connected to our source of nourishment, Christ (2:2), and remember that though life on earth fades like the grass that withers, God’s eternal word assures us of a restored, renewed, eternal life with him.

Questions for Preparation and Discussion *Note that some questions are designated for preparation (P) and some for group discussion (D). Study based on the English Standard Version*

Getting to Know Each Other:

1. Describe for the group the last thing that you experienced that you would call “perfect” (e.g., a meal, a book, an event, a friendship)? [D]

Looking at the Bible:

1. Read 1 Peter 1:13–14. Describe in your own words what Peter says we should set our hope on. [P/D] How do you think this relates to the phrase “preparing your minds for action?” [P]
2. Describe in your own words what Peter says we are not to conform to. Give examples. [P/D]
3. Read 1 Peter 1:15–21: What do you think the term “holy” means? [P/D]
 - a. What do you think the term “holy” means when applied to God? [P/D]
 - b. Discuss the statement: “we cannot come near God because of his holiness?” [P/D]
4. As a group, list the ways God has broadly shown his love for all people. [P/D]
 - a. As you look around the world and in your own experience what are examples of the way humans portray love? [P/D]
 - b. There are various things that motivate people to love. What are some of those? [P]
 - c. From Romans 5:6-8, describe the state people were in when God showed his love for them. How specifically is this love displayed? [P/D]
 - d. Peter says we are to love from a pure heart. What does he mean by this and how is it possible? (See 1 Peter 1:18, 19, 23) [P/D]

Looking at Our Hearts [ALL D]

1. When is it most difficult for you to set your thinking on the grace that is in Christ? [D]
2. What types of people do you find it most difficult to love? Are they like you? Are they different from you? [P]
3. In what practical ways could you demonstrate God’s love in the community at Christ Presbyterian? [D]
4. We have just listed practical ways to love people but this is easier said than done. What do you find motivates you to live a holy life? [D]

Praying for Each Other *(Use to help focus your time in prayer together)*

Pray that God would give you the desire and motivation to live a holy life.