



*BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions*

## **Congregational Character Part 2 - Identity**

*by Rev Marc Chan*

*<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2: 9 – 10, NIV)*

The pandemic that we are currently facing is causing us a lot of anxiety – when will we see the number of cases dropping, when will it all end? However, it is also providing us with the wonderful opportunity to evaluate where we are at as Churches and what the months ahead will look like for us.

In the Melbourne metropolitan area – and the Mitchell Shire as well – we have to wear a face covering whenever we go out, except for some very specific reasons. One of our friends told us that she was having her daily walk (with face mask on) when she saw a couple (also with face masks on) walking their dog. She sort of recognised the dog but, because dogs of that breed look quite similar, she was not sure since she was only able to see the eyes of the owners. Suddenly, she heard the man saying “Hello” to her and she recognised the voice of her Pastor – whom she had known for years and whom she used to meet every Sunday before the lockdown happened.

The face masks have taken out all the features that allowed our friend to recognise her Pastor – most of the face was covered, she could not see any smile or expression of the face or even the shape of the face.

COVID-19 is causing our Churches to be like a person with a face mask on. Our identity is masked because we are not able to fully demonstrate who we are as a Church. Our services are all online and that is the only part of our face that is exposed. The rest is all under the face mask.

This leads to the pertinent questions we can ask ourselves: What is the community we are supposedly serving missing from our Church being restricted in what we can do? Is there something unique that clearly identify who we are in the community? Or no one is really missing our presence in the community?

It is a timely reminder that we are “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God's special possession***”, and also “*Once you were not a people, but now you are **the people of God***”. The face mask can take away some of our features but there are others that can still make us recognisable – like our voice.

As **God's special possession**, in our wish to see the Church flourish, are we doing what He is calling us to do? As a flourishing Church, we have a clear sense of who we are – a sense of being **the people of God** called to achieve what He wants us to. We know where we come from, where we are at now and where we are going. Our identity is in Christ and we are part of His body knowing what role we are playing as part of that body.

As such, even though we may be wearing a face mask at the moment, with part of our identity covered, we are still able to stand out and be recognised through our voice – the Hope, Love and Care that we can bring to those around us.

At the same time, we have the opportunity to re-evaluate where we are now and prepare ourselves to be ready to go forward when our whole identity as **the people of God** can be fully revealed post-lockdown. Let's join together in a union of flourishing Churches with Christlike followers, that redeems society and brings transformation to Victoria.

### **Reflection:**

1. What does the New Testament say about who we are as Christians?
2. What does 1 Peter 2:9 say about who we are as Christians?
3. What is the community we are supposedly serving missing from our Church being restricted in what we can do?
4. Is there something unique that clearly identifies who we are in the community or is no one really missing our presence?
5. As **God's special possession**, in our wish to see the Church flourish, are we doing what He is calling us to do?
6. How can we prepare ourselves to be ready to go forward post-lockdown?

*<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3: 20 – 21, NLT)*

Blessings,

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