1 Peter 2:9-10 “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 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.”

Dear People of God by His Grace:

Every once in a while you see something on TV about someone who has amnesia. They get bonked on the head or take bad drugs and they have no recollection of who they are. I’m not sure how often that actually happens in real life, but it makes a good TV show plot. But just think if that actually did happen to you -- and then you had to rely on others to refresh your memory. Do you wonder what others would say about you? What kind of a person would they reconstruct?

For that matter, even now, do you see yourself as others see you? Are you “self-aware”? Is there a gap between the real you and the image you’re trying to project? This isn’t intended to be a psychology lecture. However, a lot of who we are flows from what we are -- and that is revealed in deepest places within us: the core belief in my heart of hearts.

God tells us today exactly who we are based on who he has made us to be. Let’s consider this foundational question: “Who Am I, Really?” He tells us this: you are (1) A Person of Great Privilege, and (2) A Person with Great Potential.

Hopefully we’ll never get spiritual amnesia, but if we do, all we have to do is read 1 Peter 2 to refresh our memories. He tells us who we are: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God…. 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.” Who am I, really? No matter what spin I try to put on it and no matter how much I try to pump up my public image, the fact is I’m a poor, miserable sinner. I break God’s laws all the time. I don’t love him and I don’t love people around me like I should. And even though I don’t like to admit it, what I truly deserve is eternal death in hell. And we’re all in the same boat! We can smile nicely, live generously, and try to look as innocent as an angel, but God’s Word says, “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Rom 3:12). By nature, that’s who we are, really!

But Jesus changed all that. Oh, we’re still sinful us. But God in his mercy and grace changed our status. Jesus loved the Father and loved everyone around him flawlessly -- and then Jesus gave us the credit for doing it! Because of Jesus we went from one side of the meter -- guilty -- to the other side of the meter -- not guilty -- all because of his life and his cross.

And now look who you really are! Peter puts it this way:

1. “You are a chosen people”: 4,000 years ago, out of all the folks on earth, God chose “Abraham & Sons” to form his nation through which the Savior would be born. Today you and I are Abraham’s spiritual descendants. Our race, gender, national heritage make no difference. God handpicked you to be his. It’s not that we deserved to be chosen, as if we were the best honeydew melon or tomato in the produce aisle. No, he chose us, bruised and rotten as we are by nature, simply by his grace (undeserved love). Peter continues:

2. “You are a royal priesthood”: In the Bible, priests had to be descendants of Aaron or Levi. I don’t think anyone here can claim that! But God says you are a priest not by natural birth, but by second birth (rebirth). When the Holy Spirit brought you to faith (most at Baptism),
you were given the privilege of full and free access to speak directly to God needing no mediator other than Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and men. Any time you pray, God hears every word and syllable of his royal priests.

3. **“You are a holy nation”:** If I asked you if you were holy, I know many would say in humility, “No, I’m not holy, I’m a sinner.” But God begs to differ, and we don’t want to argue with him! He says you are holy-- because Jesus’ holiness has become your own. Right now you are wearing the white robe of Jesus’ perfection: and it really looks good on you -- all of you, his holy nation!

4. **“You are a people belonging to God.”** We belong to God not like slaves belong to a slave master, but we are God’s dear children belonging to his family. You don’t belong to the devil anymore. He has no claim on your life. God sees you and me, flaws and all, and treasures you, his prized possession. So who are we, really? We are God’s chosen, holy, people -- people of great privilege!

So now what will we do with this fantastic information? He didn’t give us all these blessings to form an exclusive club and just admire our clan. He made us a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” for a really important reason: “That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” He brought us from the Darth Vader “dark side” of sin and death and doom and hell -- and then put us into the light of truth and life and the gift of heaven so that we might declare his praises! Every day we have great potential to do this.

That phrase “declare his praises” in the original language means to give a good report. It is said that “word of mouth” is the best way to advertise. But one has to earn that advertising. If you’re a restaurant, you can’t have people going to the emergency room because of your food. Word gets around!

On the other hand, you and I as Christians have a really positive message about our Savior God in a very negative world. Believers in Christ are the protons in a world filled with electrons. Every day we have opportunities to “declare the praises” of our God.

People who don’t believe in Jesus may not understand your belief in him, but you speak loudly and clearly to them when you live a life of honesty, of hard work, of self-control, of respect for and kindness to others, of love for your family. Your caring and moral life may not convert your co-workers and neighbors, but it will have to give them pause to think and evaluate why you are what you are. You’re like these stained glass windows…letting the light of Jesus shine through you.

I know that’s not always easy. We’re all in this together. The world and its unrelenting challenges take a toll on all of us. But Jesus is always here, right at your side: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5).

Fellow Christians, in Christ we have the potential to do great things for Christ -- whether it’s declaring his praises to a dark world that needs light, or working together to retire a mortgage that brought a beautiful, functional, accessible house of worship that radiates God’s truth through you to our community. “Who am I, really?” May we never get amnesia and forget this beautiful truth: You are God’s blessed, privileged people!

Amen.