

## Sermon Pearl of Great Price

### Intro/

A couple of months or so ago, we went out for a family meal – I think it was for Alison and Colin's wedding anniversary – anyway while we were waiting for our food to come, we were chatting generally, like you do, when I said something about not knowing who I was without a role.

Well, they all fell about laughing didn't they and asked me if it was a granary roll or a crusty roll, or a soft roll or a gluten free roll, or a wholemeal roll or a tiger roll – which one did I need?

Of course, I wasn't actually talking about that kind of roll, was I? – I was thinking of the roles or positions that people have.

Most of us have a role of some kind, don't we? Tony could say that he's the organist – or David could say that he's the treasurer – or Ishbel could say that she's the flower ministry organiser – but the thing is we're all so much more than the roles we have – unfortunately though, a lot of people don't deem to be able to see beyond their roles – they don't know or understand, the truth of who they really are –

And we also give ourselves labels, don't we? You hear people say things like, 'I'm depressed,' or 'I'm dyslexic,' or 'I'm autistic' – but they're not! – That's not who they are! – we don't say, 'I'm a broken leg,' do we? – A broken leg is not who we are – we have a broken leg – and it's the same with all the other labels etc we put on ourselves – they are not who we are!

So, who are we?

That's what we're gonna explore today as we look behind the labels and the roles – I mean what does the Bible say?

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Well one of the things the Bible says about us is that we're Saints! Or Holy People –

I know I've said this before, but in the New Testament Christians are called Saints or Holy People – in all of Paul's letters, he writes to the Saints of that particular church, or the Holy People of that church – No-where in the New Testament is a Christian called a sinner – that doesn't mean that we don't still sin, but it does mean that's not our identity – it's not who we are – we are actually saints and holy people who sometimes sin –

Think about it for a minute – everyone who came to Jesus and accepted Jesus, was changed in some way – Before they knew Jesus they were sinners, but afterwards – Jesus never called them sinners – the possibility to sin was always there, but they were never called sinners again – they had a new identity as Holy People – as Saints.

I wonder, how do we see ourselves? Do we see ourselves as sinners or as Saints – as Holy People who sometimes sin?

I think that perhaps some of us might need to start seeing ourselves for who we really are – as those Holy People that Jesus has made us to be –

That doesn't mean that we can be puffed up with pride and strut around as if we're better than those outside the church – but it does mean that the label of sinner has been taken away and that we can start living lives worthy of that new identity that Jesus gives us.

The Bible says, doesn't it, that we're new creations! When we become Christians, we're made new – the old has gone and the new has come – we were sinners but now we're Saints/Holy People – we've been lifted up out of the quagmire of sin and we've been made clean and new.

This kind of reminds me of a baby who's had a bit of a poo-nami session, and that there's nothing we can do about it other than run the bath and dunk the baby in the bath to clean it up – and then throw away the nappy and the vest

When the baby's all nice and clean again – doesn't it smell lovely? That's what we're like when we become Christians – after Jesus has cleaned us up and made us new – made us Saints/Holy People,

I believe we need to start seeing ourselves as those Saints and Holy People – or perhaps we need to step up our belief a bit and let that truth influence our lives more and more.

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Something else the Bible talks about is The Pearl of Great Price.

I don't think I've seen a real pearl – I was given a pearl necklace for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday but they were man-made pearls – not natural ones.

They hadn't gone through the hardships that a natural pearl has to go through in order to become that beautiful iridescent pearl, that's worth so much.

To begin with, that natural pearl begins its life as a tiny grain of sand inside the shell of an oyster – and as time goes by, it rubs and chafes inside that shell – going through all kinds of discomfort and hardship that made it into what it becomes – a beautiful pearl. You see, the oyster builds layers of white milky stuff on that grain of sand so that it covers every sharp corner or sharp edge until very slowly a pearl is made.

Isaiah prophesied about a time when there'd be so much healing in people's lives – where their hearts had been broken – and where there has been mourning and grieving – there will be crowns of beauty and oil of joy and garments of praise

And those who've been caused shame and disgrace – will rejoice as they receive double blessings for their troubles –

And Joel talks about a time when God will repay us for the years that the locusts have eaten – that means that all the time lost through hardship and suffering will be repaid – restored to us

We can't turn the clock back but God can somehow start time again when He gives us that fresh start –

All the hardship and suffering and pains of our pasts has made us what we are today – but that fresh start begins with our healing – when we realise that piece of grit has become a beautiful iridescent pearl – that we have become that beautiful pearl.

I wonder, do we see ourselves as what we were – just the sum total of all our painful pasts – or do we see ourselves as what we are now – a beautiful pearl?

Because, you see, it seems to me that a lot of people don't seem able to see beyond what's happened to them in their past – they're still living in that painful situation – they're still carrying all that stuff around with them – holding on to the trauma –

It's not easy letting go – because there's a sense that we see that trauma, that suffering and pain as being who we are – to let go of it is scary – who are we without it – and how are we to behave without all that baggage?

Let me tell you who we are – we are those beautiful iridescent pearls and we're to behave like Saints – like Holy People'

We are not the total of our pasts – we've been made new and beautiful pearls.

This kind of leads us to the next thing that the Bible says about us –

You know, a single pearl is not a lot of use on its own, is it?

But string a few of them together and you've got a beautiful necklace – and it seems to me that this is one idea of what church is – we're all beautiful pearls, and joined together we make up the church, and this is a symbol of unity – together we make the church a beautiful thing – a beautiful place – a beautiful body of Holy People.

Have you been to a wedding lately?

What did you think of the bride?

Was her dress rather the over the top and very unflattering?

Was her hair a mess?

Was her makeup rather garish to say the least? –

Or was she absolutely radiant and beautiful?

That's how Jesus sees His church – as His absolutely radiant and beautiful Bride – His church is stunning – and that's you and me!

End/

So, we need to stop seeing ourselves as sinners – and instead start to see ourselves as the Saints – as the Holy People we are now because of what Jesus has done for us.

We need to stop seeing ourselves as a mixture of past hurts and shame and disgrace and begin to see ourselves as the beautiful pearls we have become.

And we need to begin to see the church as a string of beautiful pearls – united together – making up the beautiful church that is the Bride of Christ –

Jesus sees us as absolutely stunning and gorgeous – and one day, Jesus will come for His Bride – and there'll be the best wedding of all time.

Until then we need to remember who we are – that we are Holy People

That we are beautiful, iridescent pearls—

That make up the church, and that we are the radiant Bride of Christ.