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Scripture: 2 Peter 1: 1-11, Acts 2: 1-13

Sermon Title: Reimagining Holiness

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, I want to talk about holiness. How does that word land for you? Imagine you had a friend who was looking for a romantic relationship and this person asked you for a recommendation. Then imagine you told your friend, you knew just the person for him or her and that this person was characterized as very holy. How might your friend respond? Chances are your friend might say, I would rather you recommend someone who is hot not just holy.

When I was in high school I dated a little but I remember that being a pastor's son and Young Life student who cared about my Christian faith by in large did not make me the most sought after person in our school.

Many of the girls I knew thought I was nice, but they were more

interested in the guys who were hot rather than holy. When I attended Whitworth College and later Fuller Seminary, it was interesting because my faith in Christ and heart for ministry were more valued than when I was in high school. I found more women who were interested in holy guys. Eventually, I went to seminary and thankfully met my wonderful wife Karen.

Part of what I want to say today is that maybe in God's kingdom what is holy is what is hot and what is hot is what is holy. What does it mean to be holy? To be holy is to have your life in alignment with your deepest nature. In 2 Peter 1: 1-11, we read that we are to participate in the divine nature. We are to walk in a type of holiness where we live in the light of God's kingdom. According to 2 Peter, the divine power given to us by God helps us walk in Godliness. We can escape corruption and become participants of God's nature. By God's power working in us we then make every effort to support our faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control and self

control with endurance and endurance with godliness and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. When we live our lives in this way, we stay fruitful and we enjoy the holiness of God. Have you ever had seasons of life when it was easier to be holy. I remember the times I have been able to live the most godly and holy were when I was so active doing good things and either studying or doing ministry work that I did not have much opportunity to get distracted by less than helpful things. I remember working at camp for four summers and finding myself, so active in sharing the good news of Jesus with kids and enjoying the beauty of nature, that I hardly struggled at all with temptations.

Do you know that deep down you are holy? You are a sacred part of God's creation. You are born of the Spirit of God and created in God's image. On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples spoke in many languages and people of all ethnicities and nations came together to worship the same God, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and filled

them with praise and power. The Holy Spirit anointed the disciples to be holy. They were anointed by the Holy Spirit, so that they could be realigned with their divine nature of love and holiness.

Friends, what if holy people have the most fun. What if holiness leads to the best life possible because it is a life in alignment with God's love and heart.

Now I know why some of us might react negatively to the word holiness. Some of us grew up in more conservative church environments where holiness was a word that felt restrictive, fearful, and judgmental. Since I grew up in the Presbyterian church, I was always allowed to dance and watch movies, but I know some Christians who grew up in churches that did not allow dancing or that suggested that a couple's first kiss be on their wedding day. My grandfather Ralph Steese grew up in a conservative church tradition and was seen as a renegade for his willingness to wear a tie when many in his tradition thought that wearing a tie was liberal and worldly. Sounds silly, but still

today you have holiness traditions in churches that forbid makeup, require women to pull back their hair and wear dresses and put a number of other fearful restrictions on parishoners. Then there is purity culture with further demands of girls and boys to stay pure in relationships in a way that feels pressuring and creates fear of judgment and romance. Maybe, you experienced a Christian subculture that made you feel shameful for being a normal human being with natural interests and desires. I am sorry if that happened to you. I have experience that too at different times. I understand that holiness might be a tough word.

If the word holiness is painful for you, let us reimagine holiness as a life that embraces the sacred. When we say everything is sacred, we remember that the Holy is in all things. Deep down we are holy and the world is holy where we see God's presence in the world.

What if the coming of the Holy Spirit awakened people to their deep connection to God and one another. I believe Pentecost healed tensions

related to race and culture and produced a peaceful community of love and holiness. It helped create for a time a multicultural community of generosity and compassion within the early church that included the sharing of possessions and provision for the poor and oppressed.

Holiness my friends is about moral living and social justice. We are called to healthy relationships of compassion, humility, and grace and we are called to address injustices, such as racism and other forms of prejudice based on gender or identity. The Gospel remember is about moral justice and compassionate actions. We are called to care for refugees, asylum seekers, and all immigrants. We are to have compassion for people who are houseless and those with mental illness. We are not to judge. We are to treat people equally and foster peace and unity. We are to be holy as God is holy, because we are created in the image of God. Our divine nature is holiness.

Okay, you may say now, Pastor Chris I am imperfect. I do not always live a holy life. But despite what we have been told holiness is not about

perfection. Holiness is understanding that you are sacred, you already are holy. The Holy Spirit comes to remind you of your holiness and this wisdom and grace as well as the power of God's anointing helps you to live into a Christ like life of holiness where we more naturally confess our sins and seek the healing and redemption that leads to the fullness of life. We also are called to do this in Christian community. We are able to walk in holiness as we support one another by God's love and grace. We are never asked to walk alone. God has always intended for us to walk with others, to go on a journey with Jesus who is holy and gracious to us always. We are to walk in humility and to bring our vulnerability to God knowing that God can help us live an abundant life of joy and holiness. By the way, when you make a mistake or sin and everyone does, I would suggest you not stress out. Instead, be kind to yourself and remember you are imperfect and that God's grace is there for you. Give yourself a break. Be nice to yourself and let go of feelings of shame or significant guilt. It is good to have a conscience, but most people I know are too hard on themselves. As one friend recently told me, guilt

is not a great motivator for change. Grace and self-compassion are far better ways to inspire yourself to walk in holiness.

These days when I think of a holy life, I think of a life with great creativity and abundance. When I went to the Showcase dance this week for Chehalem Dance Academy and watched young women like my daughter Chiara and young men like Kristen and Joel's son, Manny Sandoz dance, I saw wonderful creative holiness in action. Holy lives experience life to the fullest. Holy people experience discipline, deep intimacy in relationships, and exhibit strong character and courageous actions that support the vulnerable.

Holy lives look like Jesus. We do have the choice to live unholy lives. We can lower our standards for our lives and live rather boring lives of attachment to money, or fame, or lust, or power. This is an option. But why not instead pursue life to the fullest. Why not become more like Jesus and align our hearts with God's heart. Ultimately this leads us to a fully human life where we embody who we already are deep down. We



become our true selves when we walk in holiness. We participate in our divine nature. We are to be separate from the status quo. We are to follow Jesus and walk in the fullness of life and love.

This will always be a journey of grace. There is always the gift of forgiveness when we fall, but we must maintain high expectations for our lives to be set apart to follow Jesus and to ultimately grow in sacrificial love for others.

When the Holy Spirit came, she empowered the disciples to walk in holiness and to become more truly themselves. This is our invitation during the Pentecost Season. Let us open our hearts to a new infilling of the Holy Spirit. Let us walk in our divine nature and pursue self-love, self-compassion, and love for our neighbor. Let us never settle for the status quo, but instead seek the fullest life possible, a holy life, a sacred life of love for all people and all of creation.

How do we live holy lives. Just be your true selves. Do your best to love well and live well. Eat good food and get plenty of sleep. Spend time

enjoying creation. Study God's word and attend worship services like this one. Stay educated about the world, but do not get consumed by negative news. Spend time with positive friends who bring out your best. Remember being around holy people helps you be holy.

Participate in the Arts, like dance and song. Play sports. Read good books. Watch creative plays and movies. Try not to attach too much to negative things. Instead embrace the positive and when you are hurting, share your pain with God and others, so that you may find comfort, new life, new hope, and transforming love.

Do you know living a holy life is easier than living an unholy life. We are hard wired to be transformed by love. Our deepest nature is holy and as we align with God's heart we begin to thrive and holiness begins to be what we are attracted to most. I know people say we are wired to be self-destructive and unholy, but I do not buy it. Yes, we are vulnerable to sin, but we are actually wired for love and when we walk in love it feels more natural for us to be holy.

During this Pentecost Season, let us embrace our holiness, our divine nature. Let us put aside the lie that unholy lives are hot. No what is hot is holy. Unholy is boring and holiness is creative and life giving. By the power of the Holy Spirit in you and in me may we walk in holiness.

If you would like to receive a fresh empowering of the Holy Spirit, a fresh gift of holiness, I want to encourage you to open your hearts and I will pray for you at this time. (Two options, open your hands on your lap or lift your hands up. This will be good for introverts and extroverts alike.) Let us pray...

## 2 Peter 1:1-11

1 Simeon[a] Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have received a faith as equally honorable as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

2 May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3 His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by[b] his own glory and excellence. 4 Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature. 5 For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with excellence, and excellence with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. 8 For if these

things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For anyone who lacks these things is blind, suffering from eye disease, forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. 10 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. 11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

Acts 2:1-13

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested

on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”