

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 15, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 23, 228:1-3, 460, 466, 498:1-4.

Lessons: Romans 9:20-33, Revelation 1:1-6, Matthew 28:18-20.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

There is something special about “belonging”, about being among the chosen ones. Whether it is being chosen at school to be on a particular team or chosen for some honor in life, or wearing some uniform or badge or pin, most people really want to belong. Unfortunately, Satan makes us think that it would be great to belong to those who reject God and follow the lusts of the world.

Christians are not individual stones lying in a field or scattered around at a building site. You are stones in God’s kingdom, built on Jesus Christ the chief stone. But all believers are not only the stones which build that house or temple, they are also the priesthood that serves it. This has happened because of their conversion and baptism. Today we are reminded of something very important about

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN

- 1. Who you are in Jesus Christ.**
- 2. What you are to do as part of Jesus Christ.**

In contrast to those who reject Jesus, the cornerstone, the capstone, and find him a stone of stumbling and offense, Peter says ***"But 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. 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."***

See how Peter piles up the descriptions of believers: ***"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,"*** God’s own people! The New International Version is so much clearer than the phrase of the King James Version ***"a peculiar people"***. The meaning is plainly “God’s own people”. When the Word of God and the sacrament of Baptism work the incredible change in a human being that we call conversion, things change. When a human is connected to Jesus Christ in faith, things change. Our status before God changes: God sees us clothed in the righteous robes of his Son and proclaims “Not guilty!” Our attitude also changes. Instead of hating God’s Word and ways, we come to love them. We see God as Father instead of judge and jailer.

By nature all humans are sinful, but now, those whom God has chosen, has elected ARE the people of God. God loved the world and you in particular. You have now received mercy, and as a result, you belong to God’s people. You are one who has been chosen. This is said to believers, and you, here today, confess that you are God’s people. Peter goes on to admonish and encourage you to fulfill your mission daily as God’s chosen people. Listen carefully as Scripture talks about the new identity of God’s people.

You are also ***"a royal priesthood"***. In the Old Testament God instituted a special class of priests for the Israelites. The members of the tribe of Levi were expressly designated by God as the men who were to have charge of the public worship of the people and to perform the functions which served to mediate between God and man. The priests were the official mediators between God and the people, having charge of the public and private sacrifices.

And yet there was one great exception to this rule. The Lord had expressly called the entire nation of the children of Israel a kingdom of priests. We read in Exodus 19:5-6 (KJV) ***"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."***

The exception is the fact that the Lord expressly ordered that every housefather among the children of Israel was to slaughter the Passover lamb with his own hand, not only for the first celebration in Egypt, on the eve of the exodus, but throughout the history of the people. Every householder was a priest at the Feast of Passover, in this way picturing the relationship between God and His people.

The Old Testament priesthood was temporary, until Christ came, as we read in Hebrews 4:14-16 (KJV) ***"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."***

Peter here tells us that hierarchical distinctions between priests and laity are a thing of the past, that every person in the world who, through faith, has received Christ as his Savior, is a priest before God the Father in heaven and may, because of the reconciliation worked by Christ, approach directly to the Throne of Grace, offer the sacrifices of prayer and praise, and be certain of a merciful hearing on the part of God. You heard in our lesson from Revelation 1 that Christ has made us kings and priests to serve God His Father. There is no need, then, of a hierarchy, of intercessory mediators, of priests, here on earth. Christ, our one Mediator perfected forever that relation between God and men by which the believers are a great band of priests before Him.

As royal priests, then, Christians have all the blessings and all the rights which Christ earned for His Church with His blood. They have the grace of God in Christ Jesus. They have the means of grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments, for their own use as well as for application to others. They have the office of the keys, the power to forgive and to retain sins, every Christian possessing the right to apply the Word of God for these two purposes. Christians have the obligations as well as the privileges of praying to God, of offering to Him the sacrifices of the heart, the lips, and the hands.

It is true, of course, that the universal priesthood of believers does not take the place of and does not encroach upon the office of the public ministry. It is God's order that gatherings of Christians should exercise the public functions of their priesthood through certain men, elected or appointed to that office by their fellow Christians. In the home the functions of the priesthood are exercised through the housefather and, under some circumstances, through the housemother. In case of necessity, also, the Sacrament of Baptism may be administered by any Christian, regardless of sex. But under normal conditions, the public administration of the means of grace, preaching before the assembled congregation, instructing the catechumens and other inquirers after the truth, performing the work of taking heed to the entire congregation, administering the Sacraments publicly and privately, is the work of the minister, or pastor, whom the congregation calls. But this office of the public ministry does not abolish the general priesthood of the members of the congregation; for it is they who put men into office as preachers and teachers, it is they who watch over the pure proclamation of the Word of God, it is they who in time of need discharge the duties of the office freely and gladly. If these facts are kept in mind, there will be neither presumption on the part of church-members nor pride or arrogance on the part of the pastors.

With Jesus Christ the Levitical priesthood came to an end. Our royalty and our priestliness are derived from our relation to Jesus Christ. Peter had said in verse 5: ***"you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*** (1 Peter 2:5) As priests, that is what we are to do: offer spiritual sacrifices.

Believers are a body that is made up entirely of priests. They – you and I – are a royal priesthood. No man stands between us and God. There is no being OVER us except God. You have been adopted into the royal family of heaven, anointed into the holy priesthood of God. You need no mediator other than Jesus Christ. This involves an obligation, as well as honor. You have been commissioned – anointed to a lifelong spiritual ministry of love and service.

You are ***“a holy nation, a people belonging to God”***. You are holy. You have been justified and sanctified. Remember how Peter started his letter by saying how you are ***“God's elect, strangers in the world”***? 1 Peter 1:1 Paul writes to the Ephesians that ***“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”*** Ephesians 5:25-27 You have been called out of the sinful world to live as God's children and to praise him as priests and to proclaim that message to others – to everyone in the world you can contact! We should completely give up the desire ‘to be like other people’, for this would cause us to lose our standing with God.

You are ***“a people belonging to God”***. You are God's possession, not as slaves, but as children, for whom he accepts a huge and unending obligation. In Titus we read that Jesus Christ ***“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”*** Titus 2:14 God possesses us for his very own. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ***“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*** And in 1 Corinthians 7:23 ***“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”***

Now God tells you what you are to do because you are all these things to God: ***“that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*** It is your calling and mission to tell of the glorious deeds of God.

This praise is based on what God has done for you, the Christian, the child of God. Hosea speaks of believers in this way: ***“I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'”***(Hosea 2:23)

The Lord calls his people the chosen generation. They have been chosen, or elected, for the position they hold by God before the foundation of the world. This is every individual believer in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. You have been separated from the world and reflect the holiness of the Lord. You are his possession, and you belong to Him.

Because we occupy this wonderful position in the sight of God, it is natural for us to share, to publish, to proclaim freely and widely, the praise of our God. It is our calling to tell men about God and to praise his goodness, kindness, mercy, and grace. We can do this because we have experienced these gifts of God in ourselves and because He has called us out of the darkness of our natural condition into the wonderful light of His love in the Gospel, assuring us of the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Peter says all this of a people who formerly ***“were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*** Peter is writing first of all to people who before their conversion had been nobodies. They had not been in the kingdom of the Lord. But now they have been transferred out of the darkness of unbelief and hatred toward God to the glory of the Kingdom of Grace. In their former state they were under God's wrath and condemnation. They have now become partakers of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. It is the same miracle which Christians of all times have experienced. And this fact they are to share with others, telling them of their deliverance from destruction, of their redemption from death, of their salvation through the blood of Christ. That is the best occupation in which any Christian may engage.

So how can you ***“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”***? Well, you could start by reading all of Peter's letters again. In coming sermons on Peter's first letter we will be speaking more of how Christians can continue to show forth God's praises. As God's children you have purposes, missions, callings and things you can and are to do for him. Because you now belong, you are loved and have God's work in front of you. Lord, help us do this work! Amen.