
We are a Royal Priesthood (Reformation)
10/29/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



“Pastor, will you pray for me?” I get that request a lot. And I’m glad of it! I consider prayer an important part of my ministry. What better way to serve other people than to ask the all-powerful and all-wise God of the universe to be with them, guide them, and bless them? He can and does do an infinitely better job at every one of those things than I ever could!

But sometimes, the request worries me. Sometimes, I wonder if people ask me to pray for them because they don’t think they can pray to God themselves, or they think God won’t listen to their prayers like he will listen to mine. I worry that they see themselves as second-class citizens in God’s kingdom, or worse that they don’t believe themselves to be a part of God’s family.

Today, as we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, we again have the opportunity for a reformation of our own by throwing off the lies Satan tries to throw into our minds and going back to God’s Word. There God shows us that we are not second-class citizens of heaven, but we are all saints, made holy in the blood of Jesus, and we are all priests, with full access to the Father through the Spirit, and with lives offered to God as a pleasing sacrifice to him.

Our first reading today comes from Ephesians 2. Here, the Apostle Paul explains that, yeah, we were far away from God. We were separated from God’s people. We were foreigners and strangers. As Gentiles, we have no claim on God. We have only our sins which hide God’s face from us. Because of those sins, God should not listen to any of our prayers. But Paul explains that we are no longer separated from God.

Ephesians 2:13

¹³But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Sin is what separates us from God. But when God died on the cross, he took away our sins. God removed that which separated us from him. Paul explains to us that Jesus’ blood, his payment for our sins, has brought us close to God. Paul continues...

Ephesians 2:17

¹⁷He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

God tells us that, by nature, we are his enemies. Our sins not only separate us from God, but they put us at war against God, but Jesus preaches peace to us; peace, which he bought us through his life, death, and resurrection. This peace counts for all people; those who were close to God, as in God’s chosen people of Israel, and those who were far away, as in us Gentiles. Paul continues...

Ephesians 2:18

¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

The peace that Jesus preached by his removal of our sins that separated us from God; this unifies us with our God. Now, all of us are united to God in Christ. Now, all of us are at peace with God through Christ. And now all of us have full access to God in Christ. Any of us can go before

God's throne in prayer and speak to him. Jesus gives us that access. Furthermore, Christ makes us worthy to go before God, not because we have any righteousness on our own, but because God has removed our sins and made us holy through Jesus' perfect life which God credits to our account.

Who could be more worthy to speak to God than someone with no sin? Christ has completely taken away our sins by his death and resurrection. Who could be more righteous in God's sight than Jesus himself? Through our baptisms, God clothes us in Christ's righteousness, so that he considers us to have lived the perfect life that Jesus lived. In Jesus, God considers us his holy children. Who could God want to hear from more than his own holy children? For whom would God want to answer prayer more than the righteous members of his own family?

God graciously wants to hear all of us pray to him, he commands us to do so, and he is eager to answer our prayers because, through Jesus, he has made us pleasing in his sight.

This all brings us to who we are as Christ's Church. Paul continues...

Ephesians 2:19

¹⁹So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household.

In Christ, we are God's people. Our citizenship is in heaven with the rest of God's saints, made holy, made saints through Jesus' blood and righteousness. In Christ, we are a new nation, not one ethnicity or another, but we are God's people, God's nation, united by faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we are fellow members of God's family. Through our baptisms, we have been adopted into a new family. Now we can call God the Father *our* father. Now we can call God the Son our own brother. Now all of us, gathered through faith in Christ, are brothers and sisters together with all the saints, the Old Testament prophets, the Apostles, all of God's people throughout history; united not by our blood, not by our physical ancestry, but by faith in Christ. We are a new family, brothers and sisters, gathered around God's Word. And we will be family together forever in heaven.

Paul gives us another significant description in Ephesians 2...

Ephesians 2:20-22

²⁰You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

He calls us God's house, a spiritual building that God is raising. Notice the description: We are built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. These are the people who wrote down God's Word for us. As we grow in God's Word, we build our lives on that foundation.

And the Word of God, written by the Apostles and Prophets, have Jesus Christ as their Cornerstone. Jesus is the one who has set the edges and lines for us in the Word. Through God's Word, Christ sets the foundation of our entire lives. He sets our edges and lines and teaches us how to build on that foundation.

The Apostle Peter continues the picture of this spiritual house that God is building...

1 Peter 2:4-5

⁴As you come to him, the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, in order to bring spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is that Living Stone, that Cornerstone for this spiritual house God is building. He is the Cornerstone, even though the world rejects him. Peter calls us living stones too. We are being built into this house.

Let me ask you, if you have a tall building and you just take a floor out of it, what's going to happen to that building? The whole building will fall down, right? If you are building a house out of stone and someone just starts plucking stones out of the walls, what's going to happen to that house?

Do you see the value that God places on each of us as members of his Church? If we take ourselves away from God's people, away from God's Church, we are pulling a stone out of this building. If we stop gathering with other believers, we are removing a member of the family. God has made all of us a vital part of his Church, together with all the others. God has made his Church in such a way that each of us is an important part and each of us needs the other parts. Peter continues painting the picture of who we are in Christ...

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy.

Peter really says a lot here. Once, we weren't a people. Once, we were not shown mercy. But in Christ, that has all changed. By taking away our sins, by clothing us in his righteousness, Jesus has shown us mercy. Jesus has made us the people of God.

And he has made us all priests, called to proclaim the praises of God who has called us out of the darkness of sin and into the light of salvation. The Old Testament describes two jobs of the priests in Israel, jobs which you and I, as Christians, are able to do today.

The first was to speak to God on behalf of the people. You and I have the privilege to do that very thing! We have full access to God through Jesus. We can go to God for anything, and especially, in this case, we can go to God to pray on behalf of others. We as those who are precious in God's sight because he has made us so in Jesus, can speak to God on behalf of those who do not yet believe and who therefore do not have that special place before God. Again, what better way can you and I help someone else than by speaking to the all-powerful and all-wise God of the universe on their behalf? He can do infinitely more for people than we can.

We can pray to the almighty Ruler of nations on behalf of our country and world in turmoil. We can pray to the Lord of the Church to send more workers into his harvest fields. We can pray that God change the hearts of those who now reject him. That is an honor and a responsibility that we have as God's people. As the priests of God, may we diligently fulfill that duty.

The second job of Old Testament priests was to offer sacrifices to God. Peter spoke of this earlier, but for now we go to Paul in Romans 12 to describe the sacrifices we offer today.

Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship. ²Also, do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you test and approve what is the will of God—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

The sacrifices you and I offer to our God as his priests are our entire lives. We worship our God, not just by coming to worship services, but by everything we do, as we do all things to the glory of God. We offer God our appropriate worship when we serve as godly spouses or single people, when we fulfill our roles as parents or children in line with how God describes it in his Word. We are a living sacrifice when we pursue our careers and occupations with God's Word in our minds and on our hearts. We worship God when we enjoy food and rest and thank God who gave us those good things. Now, notice what Peter said earlier: our sacrifices to God, our lives are not going to be perfect, but he considers them acceptable through Christ, because we remain clothed in Jesus' righteousness, we remain washed of our sins through his blood.

Paul mentions this transforming of our minds. The transformation he speaks of is conversion, being changed from not a people into the people of God, being changed from foreigners and strangers into fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. This change happens when God first marks us as his children, and it continues to happen as we grow together in God's Word, learning who we now are in Christ, and building our lives on that foundation of God's Word.

Through the pages of Scripture, God renews our minds so that we can know God's will, so that we can learn what truly is good, pleasing, and perfect. God teaches us to repent of our sins, and to cling instead to the blessings that he has won for us and promised us in Jesus.

My fellow brothers and sisters in God's family, God has made you his chosen nation, his royal priests. You are vital stones in the temple of God built on the foundation of Christ who is found in the Bible. You are called to worship your God by growing in the Word and by building every aspect of your life on that Word, by going with the Word and proclaiming the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light. Please, keep asking your pastors to pray for you. We are more than happy to do so. But since you also have full access to God, and since you too are perfect in God's sight through Christ, I ask that you keep praying for us too. Amen.