



The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord
February 9, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

1 Peter 2:9-12

A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD BELONGING TO GOD

“There’s something different about you, isn’t there? There is something about you that I just don’t see from anyone else. How do you keep a smile on your face? How do you keep plugging away at your job when I get so fed up with mine? How do you just take bad news in stride without it weighing on you?” Has anyone ever posed those questions to you before? Have you ever had the experience that you had something that someone else wanted in their life so badly, and they just tried so hard to get it but couldn’t find that peace in their lives? People want what Christians have, even if they don’t always admit it. Today we get to talk about how to give it to them. Today we get to talk about our role as priests.

Last week we talked about Jesus as our great High Priest. How is Jesus a priest? Well, what does a priest do? A priest represents. He is a go-between. Jesus went between us and God and he represented us before him. Jesus, as true God, went straight into the Father’s presence to present himself as a perfect and holy sacrifice to take away our sin. As true man, Jesus perfectly represents us as he sympathizes with us, knowing what we go through and comforting us with the truth of his Word and the truth of his saving work. Jesus is our representative, our High Priest. And what’s the result of all this great and perfect work of Christ? Peter tells us in our text this morning:

“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.” The result of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice as the perfect High Priest for us is that we are now God’s people. Peter spells it out, this great news about our restored relationship with our 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.” That’s the wonderful news about Jesus! It’s what we have to bring to others. It’s what makes our lives worth living, to know that there is more than just what’s around us. People long to know what happens after death. People long to know about the God whom they can’t deny exists. People long to know how

to get comfort in life when things get bad. And we can give it to them.

We are God’s representatives. God has made us priests. That’s also part of the result of Jesus’ work as the great High Priest. That’s what Peter says in verse 9, isn’t it? “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.” You are priests. Well I thought Jesus was the priest. How are we priests? Well, what does a priest do? A priest represents. We represent God to the world. Isn’t that exactly what Jesus called us to do in the Gospel this morning? “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” This is what we have been called to do. This is why Jesus called us out of the darkness, so that we could be his ambassadors and bring him glory as we witness for him.

The question is, do we always bring him glory? Do we always represent him as we should? If we’re honest, we have to admit that we do not. We don’t always act like the loyal and royal priests that God has made us, do we? Aren’t there times when we would rather hide the light that Christ has shown in our lives rather than reflect it to others? You see, Christianity gives us a peace in our lives, but that peace with God doesn’t always bring us peace on this earth does it? There’s a war going on with our sinful natures and that’s a war we often lose. It’s a war that wants us to follow those around us and to abandon this faith in God. Peter put it this way, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” Peter speaks of this price to be paid for peace with God, and the price is that we are aliens and strangers in the world. It doesn’t feel right when we’re here and when our faith is challenged. The result is that we lose a war with our sinful nature and we hide the brightly burning light of Christ in our lives.

We see the sad truth in Joshua’s words to the Israelites after he had led them into the war over the Promised Land. The people were led into the land that God gave them, and at the end of Joshua’s life he settles in Judah and encourages the people to rely on the God

who has provided for them. Rely on the God who has led them out of Egypt, who had done so much for them through the desert, who had given them the land they now possessed. The people insisted that they would. And what did Joshua say back to them? “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God.” They were condemned before they even started. And isn’t it the same with us? God has made you representatives, but you can’t represent God perfectly. You were condemned before you even started. And would you believe, every time we fail to properly represent God before the world we show the truth about our sinful nature and our sinful condition—we were lost from the start! We are like the new moon instead of full moons. The moon reflects the light of the sun. It has no light of its own, and you know that when it’s a new moon. There is no light within that shines out. If we think we can rely on our own light, then we’re like a moon that has no light of our own to produce. That’s what we were apart from Christ. We were not a people—we were moons with no light—we were those who had been shown no mercy from God.

Then Christ came. He chose us to be his people. He picked us out and made us his very own. “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.” You have been called out. You have been marked as people who are different from the world. That’s what it means to be holy. To be holy is to be set apart. God picked us out, set us apart, and then displays us as his prized possession, his very own trophies that he glories in. It’s like a family heirloom—like a nice set of china— that has been passed down. It’s expensive and it’s precious and it’s been in the family for years. You want to show it off to the world, so what do you do? You buy a nice china cabinet to put in the dining room so you can display it to everyone who comes. This is mine and it’s precious to me! We are God’s prized possession. We are his very own. We are precious to him. He delights in us because in us he displays his love. In us he displays the fact that he was willing to send his one and only Son to take our place and to die for us. We are worth so much to God that he is willing to give his own life for us. That’s what he did in Christ.

“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.” Jesus is the bright Sun who shines his light and his perfection on us. Now when God looks at us we aren’t dead, empty moons with no life and no light of our own. No! We are perfect reflections of the true Light of the world who shines forth through us. Therefore God delights in us. True, our actions alone

aren’t perfect. We still stumble every day. But in Jesus, he has made all of our acts perfect before God. He fills our lives with the perfection that is needed like the sun fills the earth with light, filling every space available. Jesus has called us out of our darkness and death and has given to us life and light. He has made us perfect and holy.

Jesus has put his name on us and he has marked us as his own. He did this in baptism when he killed the old person in us, the sinful nature with its sinful desires, and he made a new person in us. Now, that new person is perfect and represents God to the world. That’s exactly what Peter was telling the people. “You may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” We declare his praises. We do that when we live for him. We are now a royal priesthood. We are God’s representatives to the world. Others see the way we live and they ask those questions that I posed at the beginning of the sermon to you. They see the comfort that you have in life, a peace that fills everything that you do. They see you faithfully live a life for God, faithfully doing your work. They see a peace over you and a stillness in times of distress and hardship.

That peace and stillness comes from the knowledge of your God who promises to take care of you even when times seem to not go your way. They see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven, as Jesus said.

Now, simply because you live your life as a Christian doesn’t mean that you will convert people by the way you live. Only the Word of God does that. But your life is a witness to them of the peace you have with your God. And that peace is something that they crave and that they long for and when they see you have it they’ll ask. And when they ask, you have the answers found in Christ that you can give to them. That’s what it means to be priests for God. That’s what it means to represent him before the world. “Let your light shine before men,” Jesus said. Don’t hide it under a bushel. Don’t wish that you could have a switch that will turn it off when it becomes inconvenient. You are Christ’s representative. Cherish it! Sometimes it feels strange, as Peter said. But even that is a witness for Christ whom we represent. “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

This is what you are. You are a chosen people, a people of light. You are made that way by Christ. So live that way, so that others may see you living for him and you can tell them about their Savior too. Amen.

