

Summer Sermon Series on Church, Mission & Ministry – August 14, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Based on 1Peter 2:9,10 – written by Pastor Paul Horn

“We are all Priests with a Purpose”

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen! (Revelation 1.6)

“Where do they get these names?” This is a question that will be asked in our Wednesday morning women’s Bible study group. We began reading Genesis this past week. There will be sections that include genealogies, lists of names that are hard to pronounce. You have to understand the Hebrew language. Names meant something in those days. For example: Adam means *dirt or earth*, it’s where he came from. Eve means *living*, because she became the mother of all the living. We will eventually meet Melchizedek in chapter 14 which is a combination of two Hebrew words which means “king of righteousness”.

Despite these goofy names Christians love reading the book of Genesis, because it contains many wonderful stories – stories of God’s love for his people. There are some books in the Old Testament that Christians shy away from... like the minor prophets. For example: Hosea... (whose name means *salvation* by the way) Hosea lived at a time when the nation of Israel had adulterated herself with the Lord by hopping into bed with every idol that her heathen neighbors worshiped. The Lord decided he needed to communicate to them that because of their idolatry, God had disowned them as his children. He tapped his prophet Hosea to communicate that message, although he wasn’t going to speak it, he was going to live it. God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, a relationship that was to parallel and symbolize the relationship between God and Israel. Hosea and his wife had a daughter, and God commanded her to be named, *Lo-Ruhamah*, which means “not loved; no mercy.” The two then had a son, and God commanded him to be named, *Lo-Ammi*, which means “not my people,” God said through his prophet, **“...for you are not my people, and I am not your God”** (Hosea 1:9).

Can you imagine doing something so terrible that God decided to name you “not my people”? In our lesson this morning, Peter points his readers and us to a time when that was true of each of us. **“Once you were not a people, once you had not received mercy.”**

Some of us don’t remember that time, for we had Christian parents who quickly brought us to the baptismal font, trusting in the promise of God, where the waters of baptism and the power of water and Word brought you into God’s family.

But... there are times that I don’t feel that I am God’s child, because of the way I treat the other members of God’s family. I read Romans 12 this week, where the apostle Paul encourages us to “...live in harmony with one another”, words many of us have heard at the conclusion of our services on Sunday morning. Are we living in harmony when we talk about each other, especially when we are bothered by something someone said, and the way they said it, or when we’re frustrated by something someone failed to do? Instead of talking to that individual about this, we complain to others, “Why do they have to be that way?” It happens not just

here at church with our brothers and sisters in Christ, but even with the members of our own family; wife complaining about husband to friend, child complaining about parent to friend. We fail to live in harmony with one another. Why do we do that? Because we fail to see each other as God sees us – as baptized children of God. Instead of asking, “Why do they have to be like that?” the question I need to be asking is, “Why would God love me for being like this?”

Others remember a time when they were not God’s people. They had lived a life in unbelief. They didn’t have Christ in their life. They had cast God aside, perhaps blaming him for something that happened. Maybe it was a time when they lived in sin, were unrepentant, and didn’t do anything to change their sinful living, like King David and Bathsheba, like Israelites in Hosea’s time, a dark time in life when God had said, “You are not my son, I am not your God.”

How awful to name a child “not loved.” How awful to hear a father say to his child, “You are not my son.” How much worse to hear those words from your Heavenly Father, “You are not my son. You are not my daughter. I don’t know you.” This is how sin alienates us from our Father in heaven.

If you notice in our lesson that Peter doesn’t dwell long on this topic. He reminds us of those dark places in our lives so that we see how bright and beautiful the love that our Father has for us! In spite of who we once were, Peter says, “**But you are a chosen people.**” The Father did not choose you like the president appoints men and women to his cabinet. He chooses them because they are qualified, able, willing, hard workers. God doesn’t choose us because of who we are. It was by his grace – love we do not deserve - that moved your Father to choose you and me to be his people.

In Ephesians Apostle Paul reminds you when God made his choice (Ephesians 1:4-5,11). He said that before God decided how high Mount Everest would tower into the clouds and how deep the waters of the Pacific Ocean would plunge, before he selected from his palate the shade of green the grass in Kentucky would be, he decided to choose you to be his people. Then he created the world. Then, throughout the timeline of history he kept you in mind, because he knew, even before you were even a little embryo in your mother’s womb, he knew what you would be; a sinner doomed to destruction, a child born that did not belong to him. So in his infinite wisdom he drew up a plan to change that. He had to do something about every single sin that you would commit throughout your life, the sinful condition that alienated you from your Father.

His plan included one of his own family members, his only Son. He sent his Jesus into this world, true God took on the form of true Man. As the God-Man living on this earth, he had real relationships with real people. Did he ever send scathing emails or text messages to his disciples tearing them down? No. He treated them with patience, and spoke to them with love and kindness. He washed his disciples’ feet. He told them, “**I came not to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many.**” (Matthew 20:28) Did he ever gossip about his disciples or even his enemies? No. He went and talked to them when there was a problem and even reached out to his enemies in love. The life of love - which we fail to live, a life which is necessary to be with the Father - Jesus lived. You are the people for whom Jesus lived the perfect life of love.

You are people for whom Jesus also died. Do you remember the words Jesus cried out from the cross, **“My God, why have you forsaken me?”** He knew the answer to his question. He knew his Father would have said to him, “So I would not forsake these people, my Son. I must turn my back on you, because in you I see all their sins. In you I see their disharmony, their gossip, their complaining, their animosity.... and I must punish that sin.” So great is the Father’s love for you, that he would alienate his own Son for you! So great is the Son’s love for you that he would willingly do this for you!

Called before creation... payment for sins and life of love completed... the Father then kept you in mind during the timeline of history. And when you came to be in this world, the Father acted to make you and me his people. He did it through the simple sprinkling of water on your head, through his simple yet powerful Word, and changed you. **“Once you were not a people... once you had not been shown mercy... but now you are the people of God... now you have received mercy.”** Yes, through baptism, the Father showered his mercy on you. Through baptism he gave you many gifts, the greatest being his Son’s life of love and his Son’s payment of death. Baptized into Christ, he now calls you **a chosen race, a holy nation, a people who belong to God.** He now calls you his child, for that is what you are through faith in Christ.

This morning, did you not stand here in amazement, as you watched God our Father work his miracle of promise on this young boy? Did we not stand in awe, like a child on Christmas Day morning, wide eyed, heart pounding with excitement, for there at the font, we know this is where he made you his child. Do you not cradle his Word in your hands here and at home, and sit in awe, for there he tells you over and over again, “Look at what I have done for you, my child, through my Son Jesus Christ!”

I need to hear him tell me that. I need to go back to my baptism daily, especially when I feel like I am not his child... when the past sins of my youth, of last week, sins of yesterday, assault my conscience. Then I will look to font, I will look to the life of Christ, I will look to the cross, I will return to this verse in 1Peter2 and listen to him repeat to me over and over again, “You are holy. You are chosen. You are a people of God. You are my possession. That is how I see you.” It gets better.

Peter continues, **“You are a royal priesthood.”** That word *priesthood* may have a warped view in our minds today as we recall past headlines of scandals in another church body. Set those thoughts aside, and focus on the words of the Apostle Peter, **“You are a royal priesthood.”** It’s not just a job that belongs to those who wear a white alb yoked with a colorful stole on Sunday mornings. He says, “You are priests.” Sometimes we call this ministry the “universal priesthood of all believers.” This term is not used in the Bible, but the concept of a *universal priesthood* is certainly found all over Scripture. Jesus’ commands to carry out the ministry of preaching, teaching, baptizing and sharing the good news was not limited to his disciples. His commands extend to every believer. Every believer is a priest. You are priests. So, what are your plans for your priesthood?

Peter helps us understand our purpose as priests, **“So that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** God never intended to have couch-potato Christians. God wants his priests to act. He wants them to have a purpose. **“To declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** This morning through liturgy, hymns, lessons and

sermon, you have heard again the wonderful deeds of your Father. It has touched your heart and your mind. It has comforted you. It has refreshed you. It has strengthened you to begin this week with the power of the Holy Spirit. How can you not declare that same message to others – by inviting them to worship, by reading the Bible with them, by bringing them to Bible class and Sunday school - so that they, too, may experience what you have? How can you not search for ways to carry out your office as a priest – by saying, “Pastor Horn, help me discover my gifts and abilities - so that I can go to work in God’s kingdom in this place. Give me resources to be a faithful priest in my home and my community. Equip me. Teach me. Show me how to be a priest for my Savior. So that I may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called me out of darkness into his wonderful light!”

This morning, when you leave those doors, you will go out into your homes, your places of work, your neighborhoods and you will be priests for your Savior. That is how God made you. That is what you are. That is what you will be.

I pray that your Father in Heaven will bless you this week as you carry out your office as his priest. Amen.