

### **1Peter 2:2-10**

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation - if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **John 14:1-14**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

## Sermon

What does it mean to be a believer in Jesus Christ? Who does the work of the church? What role do I play and what role do you play?

Throughout the history of the church, there has been a tension between the role of “professional” ordained ministers and lay people. The professional ministers do the preaching, baptize, and preside over the table. All that lay people have to do is listen to what the preachers say and receive from us the sacraments. The results of this way of thinking is an active clergy and a passive laity. And so when it comes to the apostolic mission of the church, who is it that is called out and sent out to be agents of the liberating and reconciling work of God in the world? Ministers and other professional Christians! It is their job, and the task of the laity is only to pay them to do it.

*like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

The role of the priest in both the Old Testament and the New was to be the mediators who bring God to people and people to God. It was the priest who presided over the sacrifices in the temple, a sign of confession and mercy. It was the priest who entered the holy of holies, into the presence of God, and listened for God’s will. It was the priest who shared with believers all the wonders that God had done and was doing. And Jesus opens up this priesthood, not just to a few individuals, but to all who believe in him.

*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.*

So what does it mean for you to be a priest? What does it mean for us to be part of the priesthood of all believers? For one it means that there is no such thing as a passive believer. All of us who claim to follow Christ have an active calling, a role to play - not just as worship attenders on a Sunday morning, but as a people who live out our faith every day, make our faith a visible sign of God’s love, pointing to Jesus in whom we find hope and mercy and grace and new life.

Being a believer is much more than a state of mind or heart, being a part of the priesthood of all believers means that we live our lives differently. What does that mean? For one, we are called to actively look for ways to serve God and serve our neighbor. We go out of our way to try and be helpful, to be merciful, kind, and gracious to all those that we meet. Does that mean we are perfect, that we never get angry or frustrated with our neighbors? No, we are still human and we still struggle with the imperfections of others and of ourselves. But still we persist in our working for the good of our community, of all people, and of our creation.

We also are called to be witnesses of God's mighty acts. That is, we are called to be looking for those places where God is active in the world today. And how do we know we are witnessing God's mighty acts? We look for where love is at the center of relationships, where reconciliation and mercy are visible, where healing and life are celebrated. We look for the beauty and the awe-inspiring, for the great mysteries and for the peace. And when we see these mighty acts of God, we name them, we praise them, we celebrate and we worship.

Maybe the most important role that each of us has is to work to live a holy life acceptable to God. Not a perfect life, we know we can not, but as one that seeks to be acceptable to God's calling. We must look for the grace in the world, but we must live that grace in our lives. This includes then seeking to deepen our understanding of God and our faith in Jesus, it means working for reconciliation and love, it means we are mindful of our decision and actions so as to lift up God's justice and mercy as opposed to creating injustice or suffering.

Friends, we are the church, we are the body of Christ, we are a royal priesthood, an apostolic church that is sent into the world, each one of us called, to serve, witness and to live a life acceptable to God. That is why we come to worship, that is why we come to the table, and that is why we depart claiming our purpose in the world each week. Wherever you go, God is sending you. For you are a holy priest and together we are the church.