

Easter 5a – ‘The privilege of declaring God’s praises with our lives’

Theme verse: 1 Peter 2:9, “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.”

Pray: Lord, please be with us today nourishing and sustaining us through your word. Thank you that you continually call us to yourself and through faith have given us the right to be called children of God, a Holy people and a Royal Priesthood. Lead us to live in the faith we’ve received and profess - seeking your constant help and forgiveness when we miss the mark. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

1. Today is a God-given opportunity for us to get back to the basics – our roots and foundation.

It’s an opportunity to move again from ‘head knowledge’ to ‘heart knowledge’ as the Holy Spirit works faith, belief, an unwavering trust in Jesus Christ above all the other things in our lives.

Today is an opportunity for us as a community of washed, justified and sanctified (holy) people – united with Jesus to be open, honest, humbled and maybe even repentant before God.

Today is a new and fresh opportunity to comprehend again who you are in Christ, along with the great privilege and honor that goes with everything you have received with your new identity. I say received because everything you have has been given to you. And I say privilege and honor – because you haven’t received just any calling, but a Holy calling that you and I get to participate in on a daily basis.

That’s a privilege and an honor – unless we’ve found ourselves cold and unaffected by God’s gifts...or desensitized or bored or maybe just plain ungrateful.

2. An archbishop was telling a story of a Catholic Priest. This Priest was hanging out at the church hearing confessions and declaring God’s grace to repentant people. Meanwhile outside there were three young Catholic fellas who thought they’d have some fun with the priest.

So they gathered together in a huddle to see who would win the prize for the most elaborate concoction to confess to the priest. One lad won the prize and with a sly grin on his face went into the church to act it out for the priest. He went into the confessional and unloaded his story with great precision...

The priest knew pretty much instantaneously that it was a load of rubbish. It was really an offensive act wasn’t it? (true story) and accordingly the Priest said to him, ‘Okay son, you see that statue of Jesus hanging on the cross before the altar? I want you to approach the altar and look Jesus in the face and say three times out loud:

“Jesus, all this you did for me, I just don’t give a damn”

Easy! Thought this young lad. He went up to the altar looked Jesus square in the face and said, “Jesus all this you did for me, I just don’t give a damn.” There that wasn’t so hard!

Then the second time, “Jesus all this you did for me, ...I just....don’t give a ...damn”

Then the third time, “Jesus.....all this you did for me.....I just....I just....”

He went back into the confessional and got real about his life and failures and he confessed properly and received God’s forgiveness. That kid also went on to become the very Archbishop of Paris who told that story.

3. Those words given to the young boy by the priest are confronting. And they should be! Because when we forget who we really are as God’s children through baptism and faith and don’t live out the calling we’ve received – we act out of character...like our real calling doesn’t matter. Like the inheritance that Jesus won through intense suffering, crucifixion and death doesn’t matter to us. And so Peter exhorts his original hearers and us today in, v1 ***“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”***

Martin Luther said that all these things are like an evil guest in our home that we struggle to kick out the door. It’s so hard to get rid of these things! And he’s right isn’t he?!

As disciples we still struggle with sins that cause rifts and divisions in our relationships. It happens here at church and in our various callings in the world. And while these things affect our relationships, they also tarnish our witness!

When words are like venom instead of words that encourage and build up; if our words and actions tear down and destroy instead of affirming what is praiseworthy and honorable – then whose praises are we declaring?

So we call on God to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Peter points us to the source of that in-filling again today. **V2 *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk (we could call it word-milk) so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*** (you might write word-milk in your bible beside 1 Peter 2:2)

In response to the living and active word of God, we repent and confess that we’ve missed the mark in all kinds of ways. We do that knowing our God is faithful and will purify us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That’s the transforming power of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the lives of His disciples – in your life and my life.

We know this for certain because we nurse on God’s word-milk – which gives life and transforms lives...

4. V4, *As you come to him, the living Stone [that’s Jesus]—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 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.*

Did you notice that this word of God is actually written on the walls of the original church and in this building? That’s significant for us! This text is foundational and formational for us!

This holy priesthood [which is you and me] is also a "spiritual house." You are all living stones built by God into a spiritual house - a temple made for the presence of a holy God. Listen to the way Paul said this in Ephesians 2:19-22

You are . . . of God’s household, . . . Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

It’s written on the walls of our church! Each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). But there is more of God to be known and enjoyed than anyone can know in isolation. Paul says that we are being fitted together as a temple and dwelling place of God.

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There is a presence and power and manifestation of the Spirit of God in this gathering of worship that’s not the same when we’re alone or isolated from the flock.

We are not just isolated living stones. We are, verse 5 says, being built (by Christ—“I will build my church”) as a spiritual house of Royal Priests.

Friends the stones are meant to fit together in God’s house here at Trinity (Our Savior Atherton) so that something whole, something more than a group of individuals comes into being—a temple, a dwelling of God.

It’s so important in an individualistic world that the church ‘gets this.’

So as we nurse on the milk of the word, God transforms our lives. More than that God is building us into a Spiritual house where Christ is the cornerstone. And a spiritual house that is filled with priests. I’m not talking about pastors – I’m talking about you!

5. Let’s listen again to the milk of the word and hear what God says about you today... *“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.”*

This is who you are in Christ Jesus.

Solely, exclusively, on account of Jesus death and resurrection in your place – He has done this for you and continues to work it out in your life: *(invite to close eyes are listen)*

- *You are **Chosen***
- *A member of the **Royal Priesthood***
- *Part of a **Holy nation***
- *People **belonging to God***
- ***Called out of darkness and into His wonderful light.***
- *....that you may declare **God’s praises** in every aspect of your life.*

Is it possible to hear this and say or think, **“Jesus all this you did for me, I just don’t care?”**

To live out this identity is simply to be who God has made you to be. To ignore it or to be bored or ungrateful is out of character for the Royal Priesthood of God. To live in its promises is to be what you are: A holy & Royal Priesthood.

As Holy and Royal Priests we present our bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. That means that everything you do with your body is to be done as an act of worship to God. Whether you eat or drink or hammer nails or drive a car or make a meal or program a computer or read a book or play sports or operate a sewing machine —whatever you do with your body, do to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

As Holy and Royal Priests we sing or speak words of praise to God like the bible says, ***“Continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.”*** This happens when you’re by yourself and when we gather together for worship as we are now.

A Holy and Royal Priesthood offers acts of love - like giving and sharing. In Philippians 4 Paul receives gifts of support from the church there and says, ***“I received...what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”*** And in

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Hebrews it says, ***"Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."***

That speaks directly into our situation doesn't it as we ask ourselves as God's Royal Priesthood in Cairns if our giving is a true reflection of our hearts? The need is urgent. What kind of ministry do we want to see taking place here in the future? The sky isn't even the limit when it comes to God – but only the Royal Priesthood in this place can make that call. It's your call.

6. You haven't received just any calling in your life, but a Holy calling that you and I get to participate in on a daily basis. It's such an honor! You have been chosen, called, declared by God to be His Holy and Royal Priesthood. You have a place with the Creator of the universe who has called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. How will you declare His praises with your life this week, this month and this year? How can you live in your priestly calling where God has placed you? Amen.