

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 Peter 2:4–10**

**Sermon: “Royal Priesthood”**

In his writings regarding the priesthood of all believers Luther makes this point several times: *“Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood . . . and there is no difference at all (between clergy and laity) except that of office”* (Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960] 91). Paul devotes considerable time sketching the same truth that the body is not one member but many (1 Corinthians 12:12–26).

We read in our text the familiar verse: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

“Can anyone there tell me who I am?” This question was asked by a weary, unshaven man at a convention of the American Legion. He was in uniform, at least of a sort wearing an old navy jacket but with trousers of army or marine vintage.

There was no “dog tag” around his neck, nor were there any name tags on his clothes. His pockets contained a few dollars but no wallet.

There must have been many converts in the early church with their own identity crisis. They heard and wondered about the several names read in Peter’s letter *“to God’s elect, strangers in the world . . . a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”* Each had its special meaning, but one name stood out because it was given twice: *“a holy priesthood”* and *“a royal priesthood.”* To men and women who had lived in “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry,” such a high and respectable title surely made a deep impression.

In every age some have regarded people as little more than animals. Karl Marx said that man is an animal, a hungry animal. What he wants most, claimed Marx, are three meals a day. If he doesn’t get enough to eat, he’ll be troublesome. He must be assured that he won’t get hungry; ultimately this is the way to world peace.

Charles Darwin thought otherwise. To him man is an animal, but a fighting animal. He must struggle and gain power if he is to be satisfied. Just having enough to eat isn't enough; he must dominate. Make him boss so he can give orders and bask in the praise of others and he'll be content. Sigmund Freud disagreed. Man is a lustful animal. He must have freedom in sexual matters or he'll be unhappy. Let his biology have free rein and all will be well. Aristotle also said that man is an animal. His greatest need is knowledge. Educate him about the consequences of right and wrong and he'll choose the right. He misbehaves because he doesn't know any better.

Jesus and his disciples did not argue about differences between man and animals, but they had no doubts about the enormity of man's, sinfulness. By nature, we are all ***“dead in transgressions and sins”*** (Ephesians 2:1), ***“hostile to God”*** (Romans 8:7). Because of this condition it is necessary to be ***“born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring Word of God.”***

Our Lord said, “*No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5). In the waters of Baptism, bonded with the Word, the Holy Spirit works saving faith in Jesus Christ and a person is truly reborn.

This alone qualifies God’s people to be holy and royal priests. When Israel became a nation, the Levites, one of the 12 tribes, were set apart to be priests. Among other requirements, a priest had to be without physical blemish and could marry only a virgin. The new priesthood, however, is based solely on faith.

### **What are the priests to do?**

While the major task of the Old Testament priests was to offer sacrifices to God, another kind of sacrifice is the responsibility of the new priests. Peter urges us to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The immediate sacrifice is one of “*praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name*” (Hebrews 13:15). This obviously is our worship, especially with other Christians.

***“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing”*** (Hebrews 10:25). In our day of individualism (“I’ll do my own thing”) one often hears “I don’t get anything out of going to church.” What we “get out of it” is the privilege of glorifying our God. We remember Mary of Bethany, who chose ***“what is better”*** when her irritated sister Martha reprimanded Jesus for not directing Mary to help her with preparations that had to be made. Jesus gently informed her that listening to the Word has priority (Luke 10:39–42).

This is where genuine worship begins: “Our Lord speaks and we listen. . . . Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure” (Lutheran Worship, 6).

But worship doesn’t stop there. We declare his praise when we ***“do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifice God is pleased”*** (Hebrews 13:16). What keeps us from doing good? There are many excuses but one especially, often not recognized is just plain laziness.

The ancients called it “sloth,” suggesting the three-toed creature that hangs by his claws for days without a care in the world.

In a parable closing the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares two builders. The wise builder built his house on a rock, and the house stood firm in a storm. The foolish man built his house on sand, and it fell with a great crash as the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew (Matthew 7:24–27).

Was he warning against laziness? Or was it like sewing a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, which makes the tear worse under stress (Matthew 9:16). He upbraids the lazy servant who hid the talent entrusted to him in the ground rather than putting it to work (Matthew 25:14–30).

Our Lord and his disciples were anything but lazy, going **“around, doing good”** (Acts 10:38), so busy with ministering to the needs of others that **“they did not even have a chance to eat”** (Mark 6:31).

The 28th chapter of the Old Testament book of Exodus describes in great detail the priestly garments God ordered Aaron and his sons to wear: breastpiece, ephod, robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. They were colorful, gold, blue, purple, scarlet and adorned with precious stones.

God's New Testament priests do not wear such garments.

Rather our vestments are the prayers they offer on behalf of others, the kindnesses, the cup of cold water, the hands that reach out to heal and help. That is how we live, as the royal priests of God, as we offer our sacrifices of praise and live in the sure hope of our inheritance that awaits all the *“chosen people”* who have been *“called out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

Amen