

Sermon Draft

Text: Exodus 19:2–8

Sermon: “A Chosen People”

This Sunday is within the Pentecost season with its emphasis on the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians and among God’s holy people in Christ’s Church. God desires the praise of all people. Our Psalm affirms this with the directive that all people on earth should sing a psalm of thanksgiving, worship the Lord with gladness, and come into his presence with joyful singing because he has made us and is faithful and loving to us.

Although all the earth belongs to the Lord, as it says in the Old Testament Reading, he chose the ancient Israelites to be his treasured possession, making them a kingdom of priests and holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6). The same is true for Christians in the New Testament (see 1 Peter 2:9), yet our status is greater in the incarnate Christ. For, as the Epistle teaches, Christ has reconciled God and man by the communion of his divine and human natures and his saving death and resurrection (Romans 5:6–10). In the Gospel, we anticipate the apostolic ministry which Christ would establish to bring the Word of salvation to all mankind. Through his sent ones, the Spirit of the Father speaks (Matthew 10:20).

The ancient Israelites were in Egypt four hundred years, and they were slaves to the pharaohs for most of that time. They were oppressed and forced into hard labor. They were defiled both by the false gods of Egypt and by the abuse of their slave masters. From a human perspective, the Israelites seemed to be the most accursed people on earth, abandoned by God to rot away like thrown-out garbage.

But the Lord heard their cries for mercy, and he saw their misery. He had compassion for the people of Israel and sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt and out of slavery. After punishing the Egyptians with plagues and destroying Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, God led his people to Mount Sinai, where he established his covenant with them, gave his Law to them, and instituted his Divine Service for them. Rejected refuse? No, God made the Israelites his treasured possession. Oppressed slaves? No, God made them his royal priests. Defiled people? No, God made them his holy nation. God delivered them from their slavery in Egypt so that out of all the people on earth, they would be his chosen race through whom he would send his promised Messiah to be the Savior of the world. What a high honor!

God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament involved establishing the ancient Israelites as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Interestingly, the Lord did not originally give them a king. That came many years later. God himself was Israel's King, and through his moral and ritual law, he ruled and served Israel through his chosen representatives.

Although Moses was the lawgiver and founder of Israel as a worshipping nation according to the Lord's instructions given on Mount Sinai, the main representative of God throughout the entire history of Israel was the high priest. The high priest represented the Lord's kingship both by being anointed and by wearing a golden crown on his head. Thus, he was seen as a royal representative of God.

The high priest was obviously a priest who was made holy by the ritual acts carried out at his ordination. The high priest represented God to the people of Israel, as seen by the inscription "Yahweh's Holiness" inscribed on the front of his crown. But he also represented the people to God by bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the shoulder panels and breastplate of his ornate vestments. In this way, all the people of Israel were royalty, priests, and holy.

Now, in the New Testament, in Christ, Christians are Kings, Priests, Holy, for Christ is the High King of kings, the High Priest of priests, and the Most Holy of holy ones.

Christ is a king, and in him, we Christians, too, are royalty.

But Christ is not like the oppressive kings of the earth. He is a heavenly King, who has come to establish his eternal kingdom. In the Old Testament, the kingdom of ancient Israel pointed ahead to the kingdom of Christ. Just as the people of Israel were God's royal people who participated in the kingship of the high priest, so also we share in the royalty of Christ. The Son of God was not incarnate and did not become man merely to rule over us as his subjects. Rather, he united our human nature with his divine nature so that in him we would reign together with him. Christ is the King of kings and we Christians are the kings whom he is the King of! Just as the Old Testament high priest carried the people of Israel into the presence of God, so Christ bears us into the divine presence and seats us together with him on his own throne. His kingdom does not oppress us; it exalts us!

Christ is our High Priest, and he is far greater than all the high priests of the Old Testament. Whereas the priests of old were limited in their service to a number of years, Christ's priesthood is an eternal one. In the Old Testament, the high priest offered incense and animal sacrifices for the benefit of the people. The blood of the animals atoned for the sins of the Israelites, especially and most comprehensively on the Day of Atonement. The remainder of the blood, which was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat of the ark of the covenant, was brought out of the Most Holy Place with the power to sanctify and reconsecrate the temple.

In the New Testament, Christ entered not into an earthly sanctuary but into the heavenly Most Holy Place, not with the blood of animals (which can never atone for sins) but with his own blood to make full payment for all the sins of all people—including yours and mine! In Holy Communion, Christ now offers his heavenly divine blood to sanctify the temple of our body and life.

Moreover, in Holy Communion, Christ makes us one with his body as he gives us his body to eat. As we receive his body and blood, Christ unites us to his priesthood in which we offer the incense of prayer and the sacrifice of praise to God on behalf of our fellow human beings.

Although the priesthood of ancient Israel was temporary, the priesthood that we Christians have in Christ is eternal. And it gives us daily access—not merely once per year—to God on his throne in the heavenly Most Holy Place.

Christ is Most Holy; he sanctifies us to share in his holiness.

In the Old Testament, God instituted the offerings and sacrifices in ancient Israel's Divine Service to effect two things for his people. On the one hand, the specific offerings that were called holy had the power to cleanse or purify. In fact, the blood of all animal offerings was used to make atonement and purify from ritual uncleanness. People who had been defiled through their own sins or who had come into contact with some unclean thing were made ritually pure by the atoning blood and the holy offerings. On the other hand, some offerings were called most holy, and these had the power to sanctify. People who had been desecrated were sanctified and reconsecrated by contact with the most holy things. The most holy offerings sanctified the Israelites so that the Most Holy God could dwell in their midst without destroying them because of their sins.

All of the holy and most holy offerings in the Old Testament pointed to Christ, who came to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice. Through his cross, we are purified from our uncleanness and sanctified to share in his holiness. His most holy blood has made complete atonement for our sins in the heavenly Most Holy Place, and in the New Testament Christ instituted not sacrifices but sacraments, which both purify us and sanctify us at the same time. The Most Holy Christ gives us his most holy Word, most holy Baptism, most holy Absolution, and most holy body and blood to cleanse us continually from the filth of our sins and to sanctify us continually to share in his own holiness. In the Most Holy Christ, we Christians are made holy so that the Holy Father, Holy Son, and Holy Spirit will dwell among us and us with him in the Divine Service now and hereafter for all eternity.

God the Father has conceived us into Christ by his Word. He has given us new birth into Christ and made us his children in Baptism. Our heavenly Father continues to feed and nourish us in our eternal life with the body and blood of Christ.

As God's children in Christ, we are a royal heirs of his kingdom and reign together with Christ already now by faith. What's more, we will forever reign with him as a king on his throne in our resurrected and glorified bodies.

As God's children in Christ, we are a high priests, not in the Old Testament order of Aaron but in the eternal order of Christ, the Melchizedek of the New Testament, who has opened the way for us to have daily access to our triune God in the heavenly Most Holy Place.

As God's children in Christ, we have been sanctified and continue to be made holy by the Most Holy One through his most holy Word and Sacraments.

In Christ, we are kings, we are priests, and we are holy, so that now and forever we share in God's holiness, have access to him in his heavenly sanctuary, and reign with him on his glorious throne in heaven.

Amen!