

1 Peter 1: 1-10
John 14:1-6
May 3, 2026

A Priesthood

We are presently in the graduation season, a time when teachers say to their students, “you have passed,” and are ready to move on to the next level of education, or to employment in a vocational field.

It is possible for a teacher to serve as an illustration of what, in a different context, a priest does, which applies today because in the epistle reading, the idea of priesthood has been raised, and in ways that address all of us as believers in Jesus Christ.

Or a coach, who also teaches, and puts their teams through the rigors of practice, and preparation for competition, and then tells them that they are ready for the path ahead.

Peter has addressed the recipients of his letter as aliens and strangers in the world, by that he may mean a couple of things. First, they were not citizens, rather resident aliens, they had some status, but were not well-integrated into the communities where they lived.

Playing on that theme, Peter tells them that as Christ-followers, believers in Jesus Christ, they were aliens and strangers in the *world*. They were a part of a spiritual movement plunked right down into a crowd of Pagan religious expressions, people who were a part of a whole variety of different spiritual movements.

Peter introduces them to the idea that they were a *holy priesthood*.

For Christians in the secular period, though the signs of a Christian hey-day are all around; it is possible and sometimes tempting to feel put upon, maybe even under threat. Most of us are very well-integrated into the life of our country, but there is a sense in which it will always feel odd, because even in a Christian culture, one can feel isolated, outside the group.

And yet Peter does not feed resentment here; instead reminds them of their calling in Christ. He writes,

“But you are a chosen people; a royal priesthood; a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, *now you are the people of God*; once you had not received mercy, but now you *have* received mercy.”

Bear with me while I take a few minutes to make a fuss about what it means to be a royal priesthood. Certainly it means something different than to be an ordained official of a church or someone destined to play a role in the religious life of a community.

Given that as Baptists we do not have priests in the institutional sense, but accepting that like those addressed in Peter’s first letter, we are called as a royal priesthood, it is right and proper that we should seek to know the meaning of our calling.

The concept of a priest is a bit hard to define. The most common definitions derive themselves from the roles the leaders of Christian churches play. The examples come from the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican traditions, that have a position called, “priest.”

The concept is actually patterned after the rolls and functions of the ministers in the traditions that do not have official priesthoods. Sometimes there does not seem to be much difference between and priest and a minister.

Perhaps a little etymology might help. The English word came into use around the 12th century, about 900 years ago. It is related to the Late Latin term, “presbyter,” which refers to someone who is mature, and thus wise, and able to stand between the people and God, a kind of mediator. Actually, it means, “old man,” or in the feminine form, “old woman.”

In the Jewish religion, the term for priest is, “Cohen,” and referred to the people while they had them, who carried out the temple services. Now it is sometimes heard as a surname. Like wise, in Greek, it is a term, presumably in a Pagan religions, for someone who works at a temple. That doesn’t help very much.

There are several tasks. They carry out the ministerial functions of the church. They speak to God on behalf of the people, and to the people on God’s behalf. In Baptist life we don’t have priests per se. Instead there is a doctrine called, “The Priesthood of All Believers,”

which means that all of you are priests, thus are responsible for carrying out the church’s mission and ministries.

My guess is that most people would not desire to become a priest unless they sensed a calling to it. There is more to a calling than simply a way to make a living. Rather, and more importantly, there is *a way to be of service, to make a contribution to the greater good, a way to help*. In this case, it involves the spiritual life and the realm of religion.

Perhaps we might say it this way. Human beings are wired for relationships, that is the reason why love is the highest rule, and sometimes struggle to thrive when that calling and knowledge has not become part of their self-understanding, when what should be routine in life, part of a standard self-knowledge, is not known, is not taught, not well-coached, is not proclaimed, or proclaimed enough, or in a way that adequately communicates the substance of the idea.

A, “priest,” like a teacher or a coach, is someone who practices and prepares, and then stands up and says out loud so that everyone can hear it, in both formal and informal ways, the truth about who we are.

that we are all weak and small in the grand scheme of things; are vulnerable to Sin in ways that are universal and inescapable; that we are mortal and suffer the characteristics of mortality that include decay and death. This may seem dark, or morbid, but not really, for it is not just religion, but philosophy and

psychology that proclaim that death acceptance is associated with happiness.

Even the technology pioneer Steve Jobs, once gave a graduation speech at Stanford in which he told the graduates that the most important thing they will ever do is accept that they are dying; it makes them more human and compassionate, and determined to live more genuinely and authentically, and with purpose. It also happens to be true.

We also learn that we are created, and created good at that, are loved and cherished, that we are forgiven and on the way at least to eternal life, set free from the anxiety that comes with the human predicament; that we have been accepted by God and are destined for redemption and reconciliation.

There is something about hearing it, that makes the spiritual life and its realities more real to us. There is something about being part of a family that lives these truths and travels this journey and shares the fellowship of this faith, that strengthens us and becomes a meaningful aspect of our lives, if not the crucial aspect of our lives. We are meant to be priests to each other and for the world.

It helps to be reminded. And by someone who represents God and God's people. They tell us that love and mercy is a gift from God and that all it has be is accepted in return. That is what, as the church, the body of Christ, we are.

For reasons the coaches and teachers or even the priests much of the time don't understand much of the time, a person may have a hard time believing that they have an calling like that; or that they are precious in the sight of God. And even though they can reject that message if they are stubborn enough, or even misinterpret the message and become inappropriately proud as if they had achieved what is actually a gift;

are more likely to let the truth in question affect their lives and shape their character, when somebody tells them, when someone puts them through the rigors of practice and then trains them and certifies their training, performs the rituals that gives those truths a credential, makes them credible, that is what a priest does.

Something like that is what priesthood is. The priest does not create the reality, but witnesses to it, proclaims it, helps people to accept it and model it for each other and for the world so that the world can discover its truths as well.

That is who you are.
That is who we are.

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