

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BAPTISED

Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, 2017

1 Peter 2:2-10

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, 1 Peter 2:2-10: <sup>2</sup> **Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, in order that by it you may grow up to salvation!** <sup>3</sup> **For you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

<sup>4</sup> **You are coming to Him, as to a living Stone, whom human beings have rejected, but whom God has chosen, and who is precious to Him;** <sup>5</sup> **and you are also being built, as living stones, to be a spiritual temple, and to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** <sup>6</sup> **For in Scripture it says, “See, I am laying a Stone in Zion, a chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the person who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame.”**

<sup>7</sup> **Therefore He is precious to you who believe; but to those who do not believe, “He is the Stone, which, although rejected by the builders, has become the Cornerstone,”** <sup>8</sup> **and “a Stone over which they stumble, and a Rock over which they fall.” They stumble because they disobey the Word. That is also the end appointed for them.**

<sup>9</sup> **You, however, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people, that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.** <sup>10</sup> **Once you were “not a people,” but now you are “the people of God.” Once you had “not received mercy,” but now you have “received mercy.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Luther discovered the Gospel when he came to understand from Scripture that the way to justification before God is by faith in Jesus Christ. For a long time, he had pondered and agonised over the question, “*How can I be saved?*” At great length, he had searched and studied the Scriptures. The discovery of the Gospel was a gradual process, and yet there was a memorable day when a deep insight into the Gospel came to him as a flash of light falling into his soul. Having discovered the truth, he felt himself under inward impulsion to share it with others.

The discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith led to the recovery of other doctrines of Scripture that were lost in the course of the ages, among them the doctrine of the priesthood of the baptised. The Roman Church with its hierarchy and its tightly organised priestly system, could not and did not welcome the restoration of this doctrine. It is, however, a fundamental tenet of Scripture, and this doctrine needs constant restudy and re-emphasis lest it be neglected and lost.

The doctrine of the priesthood of the baptised is closely connected with the doctrine of the one holy Christian church, the body of Christ. Peter based the way he spoke on the temple in the Old Testament, and its priesthood. The temple had its restrictions. Women and crippled Israelites men could go no further than the court of the women. The Israelite men could go into the court of the Israelites, close to where the burnt offerings were made. Only the family of Aaron could be priests, and only they could enter the holy place, where the loaves of the shewbread<sup>1</sup> were set out. After the priests had offered sacrifices on the brazen altar in the courtyard, they burnt incense on the golden altar in the holy place, while the people prayed. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, once a year, taking blood with him to make atonement.

One of the most important concepts of the New Testament priesthood of the baptised is that there are no exclusions, and no intermediaries. Every baptised believer, man, woman, and child, is a spiritual priest. All Christians have direct access to God through Christ, who has made the sacrifice for sin once and for all. We don't call ministers "priests," because that would imply that lay people are not spiritual priests.

In his Letter, the apostle Peter calls Christ a **living Stone**. Christians are built on this **living Stone**. The Old Testament priesthood and worship is no more, because Christ, our High Priest, is the Substance of the shadow which He cast before. Peter says, "**4 You are coming to Him, as to a living Stone, whom human beings have rejected, but whom God has chosen, and who is precious to Him; 5 and you are also being built, as living stones, to be a spiritual temple, and to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says, "See, I am laying a Stone in Zion, a chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the person who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame."**"

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<sup>1</sup> Twelve loaves placed every Sabbath in the Jewish Temple and eaten by the priests at the end of the week.

Peter refers to a prophecy found in Isaiah 28<sup>2</sup> where it was said that Christ is the Cornerstone, elected to be the Cornerstone by God's eternal counsel, therefore precious in God's sight. But the builders rejected this Cornerstone. The chiefs and heads of the Jewish people refused to accept Him and to believe His Word. To them the Cornerstone was **“a Stone over which they stumble, and a Rock over which they fall.”** Being disobedient, they stumbled, they fell, and they were lost. Their doom was appointed to them because of their unbelief and hardness of heart. But to others, who hailed the Gospel as the message of salvation and joyfully believed it, He was and is precious. He is the chief Cornerstone, and they have come to Him; they have tasted that He is gracious. They rest on Him, and are built up on Him. He is **precious**, because He is the Son of God. He is a sure foundation, because no one who places his confidence on Him will be disappointed. To them who trust in Him, belongs this high office, honour, and distinction that they are priests before God.

Speaking of believers **as living stones** built up on Christ, the apostle has in mind the image of a temple, a house of worship. **“You are also being built, as living stones, to be a spiritual temple.”** The temple of the Old Testament was built of lifeless, dead materials; but here is a temple built of *living stones*, namely, believers. Rightly the apostle calls it a **spiritual temple**, since it is not material and, moreover, is built by the Spirit of God, who works in believers the faith that makes them living stones. He is Power and Life in them, His indwelling joins them together into a spiritual house.

The apostle now changes the imagery and says that true believers, whom he has just called living stones, built to be a spiritual temple, are **to be a holy priesthood**. A few verses later the apostle heaps the terms of distinction and honour by writing: <sup>9</sup> **You, however, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own special people, that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.** This passage of Scripture is the fulfilment of Exodus 16:5-6. There, God had said, *“You will be to Me a kingdom of priests and My holy nation.”* After God had led the Israelites out of Egypt, and just before God gave His Law on Mount Sinai, He said that His intention was that the whole nation should be a kingdom of priests. Because they belonged to Him as King, they were **royal**. God wanted all the people, not just the priests, to be **holy**. Because God had chosen the nation of Israel over all other nations, they were God's **own special people**, His special treasure. Christian believers, also, are called God's “chosen” or “elect”.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 28:16

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We have been chosen by God for salvation. We can trace our salvation back to God's gracious choice, which He laid on us before He made the world.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this election, we are **a holy nation**. We have been sanctified by the Spirit of God, and made sinless and pure in God's sight. We are holy, furthermore, because we have been set apart for God and separated from the rest of the world for His service. We are **God's own special people**, literally, a people for His possession, a people markedly His own. He has obtained title and deed of possession for us through the redemptive work of His Son, through the payment of the blood of Christ shed for the guilt of the world. The cleansing blood of Christ has been applied to us, so we are indeed God's own people, *His property*.

Because we are already His own property, no human mediation is required. We enjoy a wonderful prerogative in that we have the right to approach God without the 'mediatorship' of any other person. The Jewish believer of the Old Testament looked to the priest to enter into the presence of God for him with the sacrificial blood; the devout Roman Catholic is confident that his priest can act for him, especially when offering up the sacrifice of the Mass. The New Testament priesthood of the baptised most emphatically involves this, that Christians can with all boldness and confidence come to the Throne of Grace to make supplications for themselves and bring to God acceptable sacrifices.

The apostle points to a specific priestly function in our text **to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** The spiritual sacrifices brought to God by the priests of the New Testament stand in opposition to the sacrifices of the Old Testament: lambs, goats, bullocks, pigeons, the fruits of the field, etc. The spiritual offerings of the New Testament are the prayers, praises, intercessions, petitions, thanksgivings, vows, charities, and good works of God's believing people. We do not need anyone else to bring these offerings into the presence of God; we can do that ourselves, and that fact characterises us as priests of the Most High. The most precious sacrifice is the offering of ourselves to God - body, soul, and spirit - our complete self-surrender to our Lord. Genuine royalty marks that priestly act. These sacrifices are brought to God through Jesus Christ, in the name of Christ and by faith in Him. Thus the spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God.

The priests of the Old Testament in their role as mediators between God and men foreshadowed the mediatorship of our Lord Jesus Christ. As priests, we are to be mediators in this sense - that we bring to our God-estranged neighbour the knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:4

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of salvation. Peter writes in our text: **that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.** By nature, we were also held in subjection by the powers of darkness, bound in ignorance and unbelief. Yet out of this darkness we were called by the mercy of God. **Once you were “not a people,” but now you are “the people of God.” Once you had “not received mercy,” but now you have “received mercy.”** What has happened to us through the mercy of God should impel us to show forth the praises, the excellencies of Him who called us out of the darkness of doom. What are these excellencies? They are the divine love, grace, and mercy reflected in the glorious, redemptive acts of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. We want to pass on the knowledge of these excellencies to our fellow men so that they, too, may rejoice in the light of salvation.

<sup>2</sup> **Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, in order that by it you may grow up to salvation!** <sup>3</sup> **For you have tasted that the Lord is good.** Although the apostle here addresses his readers as newborn babies, we are not to think that they were still young, immature Christians. By comparing them with babies, who desire milk, Peter wants to stress that they should desire the Word of God, should use it diligently so that they might grow in knowledge and understanding of God’s good and gracious will, and become spiritually more mature. Our growth in sanctification of life must be continuous, steady, and progressive. To stand still means spiritual loss, spiritual deterioration. As priestly persons, then, we should strive vigorously after sanctification of life, filled with a sense of gratitude that fully appreciates the grace and goodness of the Lord.

Prizing the priestly prerogatives that are ours because God has made us priests and kings before Him, let us faithfully labour to lay aside every kind of wrong and wickedness, and let us follow after holiness to exhibit the kind of character the Lord expects to find in us. We have tasted that the Lord is gracious and merciful, kind and good. Let us ever pray that we may be led and prompted by His Spirit to bring to Him the acceptable sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise and to make the solemn endeavour to serve our fellow man by sharing with him the light of salvation that has enlightened our souls. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You

raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name. Continue to bless the fellowship the AELC has with ULMA.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

#### FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60

<sup>1</sup> In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, those who spoke Greek brought a complaint against those who spoke Aramaic, that their widows were being neglected in

the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> The Twelve called the whole group of disciples together and said, "It is not satisfactory for us to give up the Word of God in order to serve at tables. <sup>3</sup> Brethren, select seven men from among you who have a good

reputation, and who are full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we shall put them in charge of this duty.<sup>4</sup>

However, we shall devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

<sup>5</sup> The proposal pleased the whole group. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, who had previously become a Jew.<sup>6</sup>

They placed these men before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> The Word of God kept on spreading. The number of disciples in Jerusalem was growing very large. Even a large number of the priests were becoming believers, as God wanted them to.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, was working great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.<sup>9</sup> Some men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, as it was called, men from Cyrene and Alexandria, and men from Cilicia and Asia, rose up to argue with Stephen...

<sup>7:2</sup>a Stephen answered, “Fellow-Jews and fathers, listen! ...

<sup>51</sup> “Stubborn people, and uncircumcised in hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your fathers have done it, you are doing it too.<sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who announced that the Righteous One would come, and now

you have become the ones who have betrayed and murdered Him.<sup>53</sup> You were the people who received the Law through angels who were directed to transmit it, but you have not kept it.”

<sup>54</sup> When they heard these things, they became furious and ground their teeth at him.<sup>55</sup> However, full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.<sup>56</sup> He said, “Look! I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

<sup>57</sup> However, they shouted aloud and held their ears shut. They rushed at him with one purpose,<sup>58</sup> threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their outer clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

<sup>59</sup> While they were stoning Stephen he was making an invocation, and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”<sup>60</sup> Then he knelt and shouted aloud, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 Peter 2:2-10

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John 14:1-14

<sup>1</sup> “Let not your hearts be troubled! Believe in God and believe in Me! <sup>2</sup> In My Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also

come again and take you to be with Me, so that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus told him, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. <sup>7</sup> If you have known Me, you will know My Father also; and from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”

<sup>8</sup> Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father! Then that is enough for us.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus asked him, “Have I been with you for such a long time, and have you not known Me, Philip? The person who has seen Me has seen the Father. How do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? These Words, which I am telling you, I am not speaking on My own authority; but the Father, who remains in Me, is doing His works. <sup>11</sup> Believe Me, that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me. Or else, believe because of the works themselves!

<sup>12</sup> “Truly, truly, I tell you, the person who believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> I shall also do whatever you ask in My name, in

order that the Father may be glorified  
in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask Me for

anything in My name, I shall do it.