

Sermon October 17, 2021 Leviticus Part V

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Peter gave us a Bible verse that many of us have memorized and all of us have heard:

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. 1 Peter 2:9

This is quite a mouthful! It sounds good. But what does it mean? What does it mean that we are now royal priests? We get a much clearer picture of what it means to be royal priests when we study the ordination of the first priests of Israel in Leviticus chapter eight. Let's take a look.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting." Leviticus 8

Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to serve as priests at the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was where the famous Ark of the Covenant was concealed, and where the altars were located to make the various sacrifices to the Lord. Somebody needed to be in charge of all these goings on and also to officiate. Aaron and his sons were who God fingered for the job. God is holy. Most holy. Aaron and his sons were not holy. Through the steps described here in Leviticus chapter eight we learn how God made these would be priests able to serve before the holy God and go to him on behalf of all Israel.

And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the Lord commanded Moses. Leviticus 8

When you picture this in your head, it would have been quite clear who the head honcho was among the priests – Aaron. God designed and gave him quite an outfit! But along with Aaron, all his sons were washed with water. This was one step in the

purification process, at the end of which these men would be acceptable to God for service in his holy place. God has chosen us to be his priests, too. Like Aaron and the gang, we are not ready to serve until we have been properly prepared. What is good for the goose is good for the gander, so we like these guys are also washed with water that prepares us for service before the Lord. Paul speaks of this in his description of the church.

... having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. Ephesians 5:26

In our baptism we are washed with water and are one step closer to being acceptable to God as priests. Aaron the high priest wore a special breastplate that carried symbolisms beyond the scope of this sermon. However, Paul talks of the breastplate we are given to put on as God's priests in the here and now.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, ... 1 Thessalonians 5:8

In this role, the breastplate does not serve as a type of body armor. What purpose does it serve? It identifies who the person is and the function they serve. As we wear the breastplate of faith and love, we can be identified as God's priests who serve him. So far there has been water and a breastplate. What is next? Well, of course its oil.

And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. Leviticus 8

In those days oil was used to anoint kings, priests, and other such notable types into office. The oil was scented and carried a very pleasant aroma, signifying that what was happening was a good thing. Such oil was also very expensive, further denoting the importance of the event. Even though being anointed with oil sounds kind of cool, I'm glad God didn't chose that method to induct us into office. Instead, he uses something even better. It all started with Jesus' anointing as we learn in Acts chapter ten.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Acts 10:38

We remember how the Holy Spirit was poured down on Jesus at his baptism. That is when the anointing happens. Has anyone been baptized? If so, you have been anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit and were prepared for service as God's priest.

Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And he killed it, and Moses took some of its blood

and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he presented Aaron's sons, and Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet.

Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

Leviticus 8

Well this is a most interesting procedure! You may remember when I covered this technique some years ago in a series on the twelve chapter of the New Testament book of Hebrews. Those who heard me preach that series can tell us what the importance of the blood on the ear, finger and toe is ... nobody? Ok then, well the blood on the ear purified the priest to hear and keep the word of the Lord. The blood on the finger purified the priest to handle the holy things of God there at the tent of meeting. The blood on the toe consecrated the priest to walk on the holy ground there where God placed his presence.

This, too, might be a favorable and meaningful rite for us today. However, God has chosen another way to purify with blood, because we must be purified with blood to be acceptable priests before the Lord. Hebrews explains;

... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
Hebrews 10:22

The sprinkling here is with blood. What blood? The blood of Jesus. Here the writer of Hebrews conveniently packages together in one verse what we often refer to as the sacraments – Holy Baptism (water) and Holy Communion (blood). Who can argue with the importance and effectiveness of those!

Peter also adds his thoughts on the blood of Christ.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit [oil], for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

And there you have it again with the matter of oil and blood consecrating God's people for service before him. All of this talk about consecrating, purifying, anointing, washing, dressing is making me hungry. Ahh, and that is the last point of today's sermon – food. A priest has to eat. And the Lord made provisions for that as well. This wasn't a situation where the priests could order in some Triangle hoagies for lunch or Vinny pies for dinner! That food would not be consecrated and holy and would defile the tabernacle grounds and the priests. They were holy men and needed holy food. But from where? Ahh ... from the holy offerings made at the altar.

And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and there eat it and the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.'" Leviticus 8

These priests ate the food that had become holy as it was offered at the altar of the Lord. Like with the peace offering, we priests of God eat the holy food offered to God. The holy food we eat is the flesh of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who offered himself on the altar of the cross. We receive this holy food when we eat the meal of Holy Communion. This is why we do not permit those who have not been properly prepared to eat of the holy food. They defile the holy meal and bring God's judgement upon themselves. This is no small matter. This is no joke.

Hopefully this treatment of the eight chapter of Leviticus has helped us have a better understanding of what Peter means when he says we are a royal priesthood. We have been washed with the holy water of baptism. We have been anointed with the Holy Spirit. We are sprinkled with Jesus' holy blood. We are fed with the meal of Holy Communion. All these together make us God's holy people, priests who can approach the Lord without fear and make requests of him for ourselves and for our neighbor, knowing without a doubt our requests are both heard and answered.

God also gives the commandment, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Lev. 19:2 Having been made God's royal, holy priests, we are to remain in that holiness. This means we come to church to be renewed in God's holiness. We do the work of God's priests by going to him in daily prayer, and we bring God's blessing to our neighbor as we faithfully execute our work according to our station, vocation, and ability. God bless you as we think on these things and are prepared to learn more on our work as priests in the Divine Service of God. Amen.

Pastor Ron Breight

Christ Lutheran Church, Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

Note: These sermons are usually updated between the time of this printing and Sunday mornings. For an updated version of these sermons, visit christlutheranfhh.org.