

A Royal Priesthood- 1Peter 2:1-10

- A number of years ago at St Stephen's Willoughby we had a visit by Dr Paul Stevens,
- A theologian from Regent College in Vancouver.
- He was the Professor of Marketplace Theology and Leadership.
- His heart in ministry was to empower ordinary people to integrate their faith and life,
- From Monday to Sunday.
- I don't know if you're familiar with Regent College,
- But they have a very sharp focus on equipping lay people for ministry.
- They take very seriously the concept of the priesthood of all believers,
- A doctrine which Martin Luther rediscovered and popularised in such sayings as;
 - "A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another."
- Luther had picked up the idea that our Christian life was to be more than a Sunday morning ritual.
- And that's the significance of Paul Stevens focus on faith and life extending across Monday to Sunday.
- And it's this priesthood of all believers that Peter is focussing on in this second chapter of his first letter.

- Back in Exodus 19 God spoke these words to Moses, ->
- To pass on to the people of Israel as they set out on their journey to the Promised Land;
 - "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Exodus 19: 5-6
- God promised the Israelites that they would be a kingdom of priests.
- Moses' also wished in Numbers 11:29 that all God's people would be prophets,
- And all would be filled with his Holy Spirit.
- But that didn't happen for Israel.
- Rather than being obedient to God,
- They rebelled against him and followed their own heart's desires.
- So the prophets looked forward to the Messiah who would rescue the people of God.
- It was Jesus;
 - "a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight",
- As Peter described,
- Who was that messiah.
- In his messianic role as high priest Jesus took away the sin of the world,
- And in his resurrection power,
- Forgave our sins and opened up the way for us to be the people of God,->
- Who could be prophets,
- Who could be a kingdom of priests.
- Through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit,
- We're redeemed and empowered to be who God created us to be.
- Just listen to how Peter describes us in ch2:10;
 - "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
- Israel was called to be the people of God but they failed in that role.
- Through Christ the Church is now the fulfilment of that promise,
- We are now the New Israel and have received that original calling.
- So what does that mean for our 'faith and life from Monday to Sunday'?
- What does it mean to be a royal priesthood?

- As we look through the life of Christ,
- And his relationship with his disciples and the wider Jewish community,
- We see how the priestly role functions,
- Because it wasn't just a sacrificial role.
- The priests carried an important role within Jewish society,
- They were community builders as well as Temple servants.
- The priests led the corporate worship of God.
- They brought the people before God in praise and exaltation.
- That's powerfully described by Peter when he says of us, ->
- The disciples of Christ;

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1Peter 2:9

- No longer though is the priestly function limited to a certain class of people.
- Because of the sacrifice of Jesus,
- There's no longer a special group of people who make sacrifices for others,
- Who are the mediators between these others and God,
- Who alone can intercede with our heavenly Father,
- Who lead the others in worship.
- That verse makes it very clear that now we are all priests.

- You can see how that works in our Sunday services.
- There isn't only one person who preaches from our pulpit,
- There isn't only one person who leads our services,
- There isn't only one person who leads us in prayer,
- Because there's no function that is limited to a special class of Christian.
- Now, there may be people who have been trained up and have skills that make them better at some tasks over another,
- There are some people who do some things because of the way we order our church life,
- But there's nothing about them that makes them more holy,
- Or intrinsically more special in God's eyes that enables them,
- Over others, to do certain things in God's church.

- But we need to go further than what happens on a Sunday in a specific building,
- Because if Peter's right when he says we're a holy nation,
- A royal priesthood,
- A people belonging to God,
- Then the task of declaring his praises is something that goes beyond our Sunday celebrations.
- The task of interceding between God and man transcends our weekend.
- We're called by Jesus to be a priest in every moment of our life.
- We're called to be priests in our wider community,
- Because the temple is no longer a building.
- Listen again to Peter's words;

"Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1Peter 2:4-5

- Just look at all those people on your screen.
- As followers of Jesus they are all part of the temple of God.
- It's the Christian community that's now the temple.

- Rather than people coming to a temple which stood in a specific geographic location,
- Now in Christ,

- The temple goes out into the world,
- God calls you to be his redeemed image in this world.
- God calls you to be a priest to the driver on the bus,
- To the secretaries at their desks,
- To your family at home,
- To those faces that pass your house at 8am and return again at 6.
- The priest intercedes between God and man creating community.
- The priest builds bridges of relationships,
- Mediates between the isolated and hostile,
- Expresses meaning to the hopeless,
- Evokes faith in the doubting,
- Brings blessing to the downcast,
- And grace to the outcast.
- Can you do that?

- Can you see opportunities in your day to day life that cry out for such priestly actions?
- We don't need an OT priest to mediate between us and God anymore.
- Even if we're housebound and socially distanced,
- We can still fulfil the function of a priest.
- We can intercede for people through prayer.
- That's what Jesus does for us in his priestly role,
- He brings us into the presence of God,
- He speaks for us.
- When you pray for someone you're bringing that person and their need before God.
- And you'd be amazed by the impact that can have.

- What would you do if your neighbour asked you to pray for them?
- Do you think you'd have to ask them to come along to church to be prayed for?
- Would God say,
- 'Sorry Margaret I can't hear your prayer for your neighbour,
- Because you haven't done the four years training and been examined by the bishops.'
- 'Aah Bob, before you offer to pray for that young man just remember I won't hear your prayer because you're not wearing that little plastic collar!'
- The cross of Jesus does away with all those false distinctions.
- The death and resurrection of our Lord alters all those old ways of relating to God,
- And the people of his world.
- In the cross we see that Jesus,
- The Lord of Creation served the world by offering himself up for us.

- After speaking of the sacrifice of Jesus outside the city,
- And isolated from the Jewish temple,
- The writer to the Hebrews in ch13:16 says;

"Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Hebrews 13:16

- He's indicating that serving others,
- Doing good and sharing with those in need is a priestly function,
- A sacrifice which pleases God.
- In closing then can I remind you once again of Paul's exhortation to the Roman Christians;
- "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

- Did you hear those priestly activities described,
- Of offering sacrifice and spiritual worship?
- Can I remind you again that offering our bodies means our whole self and every moment of our lives.

- Such sacrifice and worship is not limited to a Sunday gathering,
- But extends into the other six days of our week.

- Just look at that example from the early church in Acts 2,
- And you can see that priestly community building function on display.
- Through meeting together for teaching and fellowship,
- Through eating together and praying for one another,
- Through sharing and generosity,
- Through loving and caring and blessing one another,
- We are offering;

"Those spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1Peter 2:5

- We are being like Jesus our high priest,
- And we become what we were meant to be at the time of creation.
- All of this flows out and becomes active in our life,
- Because of Jesus' redeeming death upon the cross.
- His high priestly function of offering himself as a sacrifice for us,
- Becomes the foundation of our new life on which he calls us to build,
- As a kingdom of priests,
- A holy nation,
- A people belonging to God,
- That we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.