

A Royal Priesthood

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson on the 13th Sunday after Pentecost, August 29, 1993 and upon the baptism of Catherine Ann King and Jeremy Robertson Bishop and the Profession of Faith of Lynn and Ian Bishop.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Imagine a little group of Christians, ages ago, in the Roman Empire. They're really nobodies in the eyes of their community. Some of them are even slaves. They've just been baptized knowing this could mean ostracism, persecution, even death. And the preacher at their celebration of Holy Communion reminds them who they are and what their purpose is in the world:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You, all of you, are Christ's royal men and women called to serve Christ and bear witness to the wonderful things God is doing and has done.

As we prepare to baptize Catherine and Jeremy, and hear Ian and Lynn reaffirm the faith into which they were baptized, let's remember that we're all Christ's royal men and women. We're all called to bear witness to what God has done through Jesus Christ.

When we're baptized we become royal ministers of Christ. Listen to the tasks to which our Book of Order says that Christ calls every faithful member:

A faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his Church. Such involvement includes

- a. proclaiming the good news,
- b. taking part in the common life and worship of a particular church,
- c. praying and studying Scripture and the faith of the Christian Church,
- d. supporting the work of the Church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- e. participating in the governing responsibilities of the Church,
- f. demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the Church,
- g. responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- h. living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- i. working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.

These tasks aren't just for Ministers of the Word, elders and deacons. They're the responsibility of the entire people of God.

Now let me tell you about something I read last week that helps me to understand what St. Peter means when he calls us a royal priesthood. I read about a man named Nana Kwesi Brebo

III. In the African nation of Ghana where he lives "Nana" means "Chief". As a chief, he's a very important person in his community. On special occasions, he wears robes and a crown, holds a ceremonial staff, and has drummers going in front of him to tell people he's coming. If anyone wants to do something affecting the village, they have to ask permission from Chief Kwesi Brebo III. Chief Brebo doesn't spend all his time holding ceremonies, though. From Monday through Friday he works in an office of the Ministry of Geology in Ghana. It's only on weekends that he comes back to his home village to carry out his duties as chief. He holds down an ordinary job but at the same time he's a member of a royal family.

All of us who've been baptized into Christ's church are like that. We're very ordinary people, with ordinary jobs. We're students and teachers, homemakers, public servants, business women and men, farmers, fireman, factory workers, and administrators; but we're also "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Just as Nana Brebo only comes to his village at weekends but ~~was~~^{is} still a chief even when ~~he~~^{he's} working at the office, we may only come to church once a week but we're still Christians the whole week, working beside others who need to know about the mighty acts of the One who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Our neighbors, may not have a priest. They probably don't realize it but they need us Christians, who share in the priesthood of all believers, to pray for them. Our friends may not have a preacher, so they need ordinary Christian men and women to tell them about the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ and how that God is gracious to us.

God has chosen us, not to exclude others, but so that, through us, all the world might come to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Let us pray : Merciful God, you call us by name and promise to each of us your constant love. Watch over your servants, Catherine and Jeremy, Ian and Lynn. Deepen their understanding of the gospel; strengthen their commitment to follow the way of Christ; and keep them in the faith and communion of your church. Increase their compassion for others; send them into the world in witness to your love; and bring them to the fullness of your peace and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.