

Hallo my friends. How does it feel to be a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” as we heard in the second lesson? I imagine the “chosen race” part of that probably makes you as uncomfortable as it does me, but the writer was probably talking about our new identity as the children of God not the color of our skin or our ethnic background.

As the beloved children of God we are brothers and sisters with Jesus, made into a new people who have been chosen and have chosen. It is not that God just chose us rather than everyone else – we are not somehow the elect elite – but that God’s choice found a response in us and we have stepped forward to become the people of God through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are a royal priesthood: this is not an individual charism – it is not that we are individually royal priests but that as the Body of Christ we are collectively a royal priesthood. It is unusual to combine the two functions – royalty and priesthood. In the Old Testament there are only two examples – one is the mythical figure of Melchizedek who is to the Hebrew Scriptures what King Arthur is to the English imagination – one royal priest is Melchizedek, and one is the Messiah.

And yet that’s what we are. We are called to be a royal priest for the people among whom we live and work. We get to offer sacrifices in the temple on behalf of all the people. Our sacrifice is not one of animals, but of our own hearts, of praise and thanksgiving, of prayer. In Psalm 141, the psalmist prays, “Let

my prayer rise before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” Our prayers, our worship is the sacrifice which God loves. And we get the tremendous privilege of offering our prayers and our worship in the holy of holies, in the very heart of God.

The gospel reading ended with those puzzling words, “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”? Anything, really? Is there anyone among us who has not had cause to doubt those words? I am sure that at one time or another we have prayed and our prayer has apparently gone unanswered. Even the really, really important ones.

So did someone just slip that sentence in there as wishful thinking? I think not, because it is not the only time Jesus says something like this. I think the key must be “in my name”. When we are walking so close with God that we can hear her heartbeat, when we are that deeply connected then it is as if we are one and so our prayers and God’s prayers are united, and the prayers of our hearts turn out to be the ones that the Holy Spirit has nurtured there.

We are no longer praying for a red bicycle for Christmas, we are not even praying that a dear friend will not die, we are praying “Your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.” And the royal priesthood holds up the needs of God’s people. We do pray for healing for one another, we do pray for

flourishing, we do pray for those too weak to pray for themselves. But we are not sending messages to implore a distant God to do good, instead we are standing shoulder to shoulder with God, listening to the divine heart beat and aligning ourselves and our energy with the Holy Spirit. When we truly pray in Jesus' name, we are one with him.

Remember the two royal priests - one is Melchizedek, and one is the Messiah. We are called to join with them – to join with the Messiah to bring the reign of God on earth.

The epistle said, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” We are a holy nation. Again, let us beware of appropriating this for any human nation. The holy nation is you and I and all those who follow Jesus or come to God through another path. We are not just a royal priesthood, we are a nation of priests – we are a holy nation. How do we live that out?

This week we started a conversation based on the book Soul Feast by Marjorie Thompson and something she said gave me pause. She asked, “What could happen if an entire congregation or community became a faithful doorway into God’s living presence?”

I think that is what a holy nation is – “a faithful doorway into God’s living presence.” That is what we are building together.

Earlier in the reading we were told, “like 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.”

Notice the verb there “**let** yourselves be built” - we are the living stones not the master builder. And as we are built into this spiritual house so we may become a faithful doorway into God’s living presence. I find that so inspiring that I wonder if it should be St. Ben’s vision statement! Let me know what you think.

I hope you saw the cartoon church reading of the Beatitudes in the time of COVID that we put in the newsletter. If you haven’t, please take a careful look at it – it is quite moving. The same cartoonist has one with a picture of the church and a sign that says “The church is closed” but in the next frame there are buildings like a town center with arrows pointing in windows and doorways which all say, “the church is open.” A shout out to Judith Cadigan for drawing that to my attention.

The church is closed but the spiritual house, the royal priesthood, is open and offering sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving on behalf of ourselves and all creation 24/7. Thank you for your part in that.

Were we rewording this epistle for today we might add in another description, you are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a

holy nation, a murmuring of mothers, God’s own people.” Interestingly Mothering Sunday began in England as a day when people revisited the church they grew up in – their mother church – and only later did it become associated with mothers when servants, think Downton Abbey, were allowed home to see their mothers before Easter.

Julian of Norwich referred to Jesus as our mother, not because she was trying to queer the gospel but because she experienced Christ as deeply nurturing. Many of us are biological mothers but all of us can mother – all of us can provide nurturing to one another as Christ does. In fact, as we become more and more the Christ-like beings we were created to be, so we become more mothering.

The reading from 1 Peter began with “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” As Christ feeds us so we feed one another. I am deeply fed by y’all in our conversations as we explore together the ways that Christ is building us as living stones into that royal priesthood, that faithful doorway into God’s living presence.

Thank you for the way you mother me and one another into a closer relationship with God, into our being part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a murmuring of mothers, God’s own people – a faithful doorway into God’s living presence.