Bible Study: Luther’s Five Favorite Verses

Week Five: The Priesthood of All Believers

1 Peter 2:9

*But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

1. Background on 1 Peter
   1. Unlike most of the New Testament letters, this is named after the writer
      1. They are normally named after who it’s written to
      2. Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, James, 1 2 3 John, and Jude are non Pauline letters
      3. Go to verse 1. Writer claims to be Peter, but says in 5:12 that it was written “through Silvanus.” So may have been dictated by Peter to Silvanus before Peter’s martyrdom in Rome in 64
      4. This epistle shows evidence of formal Greek education and training in rhetoric & philosophy. Some say this means Peter didn’t write it because he was a fisherman. But he could have gotten that knowledge later, discipleship is learning to be like the rabbi and Jesus was formally educated so maybe the first disciples were too. It also may be that this comes from Silvanus, whose role we don’t know.
      5. So the authorship is uncertain, unlike Romans, which we know was Paul, and Timothy, which we are almost certain was not
   2. Who was it written to?
      1. Written to Jewish Christians overseeing churches in Asia Minor. So it’s another letter written to leaders, giving guidance in their leadership.
      2. The letter is written to address persecutions. Uses code words that were common. Refers to Rome as Babylon; this appears in Revelation as well.
      3. The epistle assumes that those reading it are Gentiles, resident aliens and household slaves. Christianity is not struggling to identify itself apart from Judaism like it is in much of Paul. To some this suggests a later date.
   3. Main theme
      1. These Gentiles are suffering because their faith is calling them away from their Gentile communities. Author reminds them that they are aliens in this world, and that their true home is with God.
      2. The letter offers encouragement and hope, and reminds the readers of the suffering Christ endured for us.
2. Setting of This Verse Within the Epistle
   1. Follows the typical pattern, with 1:1-2 as the introduction
   2. 1:3-9 is the thanksgiving
   3. 1:10-2:10 is a reflection on Christian identity
      1. Identity is the piece of our faith we don’t talk about much, but it is vital.
      2. We all define ourselves in different ways. Our primary identity is as children of God and heirs of the Kingdom.
      3. You can’t NOT be someone’s child, and you can’t NOT be an heir.
   4. 2:11-5:11, which is most of the letter, is an exhortation to faithfulness in the face of trials and suffering. Contains a lot of practical instruction
   5. 5:12-14 is the closing
3. Read 1 Peter 2:1-10
   1. What is a priest? A priest is someone who appeals to God on behalf of others, typically with a sacrifice.
   2. In Judaism at the time of Jesus, only priests could go into the temple
   3. Only the high priest could go into holy of holies, and only once a year
   4. We have pastors, not priests, because we need no one to go to God on our behalf.
   5. We have a table, not an altar, because no sacrifices is made. It’s where we share a meal, not where we kill things to appeal to God on behalf of someone else
   6. Because of Jesus, we all have direct access to God.
   7. It’s important to note grammar here. You are not a temple. Y’all are a temple
      1. We, together, are a temple. It’s plural
   8. But all y’all are priests. Everyone has equal access to God, and even more importantly, everyone is called to be a priest.
   9. Verse 9 makes it clear that the role of priests has now changed. Since they don’t do sacrifices on behalf of others, they need a new job, which is this: they proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into light
   10. Therefore, ALL of us are called to proclaim the Gospel. Hence the priesthood of all believers
4. Luther’s Life and Comments:
   1. Luther believed and taught that we all became priests in baptism. It was because of what God did, not because the Pope anointed someone priest or cardinal
   2. But he viewed them as equal in the eyes of God, just with different roles.
   3. He wrote that “there are some priests we call ministers.”
   4. But being a pastor in Lutheran churches is a role, not a different state of being
   5. In fact, everyone’s role was equally important in the eyes of God. Everyone’s job, vocation, they are all equally important and all come from God
   6. If I was a Catholic priest, I would be one after I retire. But pastors must have a call to a local congregation. If I do not have a call, I am not a pastor. Because being a pastor is a ROLE, not something you ARE. We all ARE priests
5. Summary
   1. Priests have direct access to God. We all became priests in baptism.
   2. Pastors have a role in the church, but do not have a different nature
   3. All priests are called to share the Good News of Jesus with everyone
   4. Therefore, all of us are equal, and we are all called to proclaim the Gospel