

Just a quick reminder that in the weeks we are in, starting with last Sunday, today, and next Sunday, as well as the entire Advent and Christmas season, we are looking more intently at Christ the PROPHET, Christ the PRIEST, Christ the KING, and (with Advent and Christmas) Christ the MESSIAH. The first three terms: prophet, priest, and king, have come to symbolize what is known as the threefold mission and office of Christ Jesus and his Church. This threefold office is commonly called by its Latin name (in plural form), *munera*. However, a *munus* is not merely an office, but signifies a mission, what one has been sent to do. Hence, when we talk about a person, like Jesus, being a prophet, priest, and king, we do not merely imply that he holds these offices, but that he is sent to publicly manifest the powers of these offices.

Erik helped us last week look closer at Christ the PROPHET- one who teaches others the way they should live, so as to avoid evil and embrace the good. And next Sunday, Nancy is going to help us look closer at Christ the KING- a shepherd, one who governs and uses his authority so that others may be brought to the fullness of their potential. Today, and we have already begun, we are going to look closer at Christ the PRIEST- one who offers sacrifice on behalf of others and/or himself.

In the end, what we are to know is that Jesus the Christ is the Fulfillment of all Prophecy, High Priest, and King of Kings; that he brings to completion the prophetic, priestly, and kingly imagery of the OT Scriptures as he is the incarnation of the old covenants; and through the sacraments, all the Christian faithful come to share in diverse ways in the threefold *munera* of Jesus Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King for the building up of the Church and their own sanctification.

A little boy about 10 years old was standing before a shoe store on the roadway, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering with cold. A lady approached the boy and said, "My little fellow, why are you looking so earnestly in that window?" "I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes," was the boy's reply. The lady took him by the hand and went into the store and asked the clerk to get half a dozen pairs of socks for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the little fellow to the back part of the store and, removing her gloves, knelt down, washed his little feet, and dried them with a towel. By this time the clerk had returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she purchased him a pair of shoes. She tied up the remaining pairs of socks and gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, "No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?" As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, with tears in his eyes, answered the question with these words: "Are you God's wife?"

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said, “I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me something more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.

Priestly acts come in many shapes and sizes and at many times and in many places involving many people. Why? How? Because Christ lives on, and the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit is alive and well. Do you believe this?

Jesus says in Luke 4:18-19: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** And what do you think it would cost for Jesus to accomplish this? His life.

In this proclamation from Jesus, he is quoting Isaiah 61:1-6: **“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks; foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines, but you shall be called priests of the LORD; you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.”**

As a prophet, Isaiah’s expected role was to relay the will and way of God to the people of God. And this is what he did. He tells the people of God, through the power of God at work in him and his life, that they “shall be priests of the Lord” and “named ministers of our

God.” In short, they shall help reveal God to other people by being a witness and revelation of God’s love and light and peace and compassion and grace.

Okay, so here is the thing. God’s people are called to be priests in their own right. Peter refers to the church as the “royal priesthood”, in which Martin Luther then refers to the church as “a priesthood of all believers.” And through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we can fulfill priestly acts. Our hands and hearts are capable, with God’s help, to sanctify all sorts of things. However, we are far from being the ultimate or perfect example of what it means and looks like, of being THE HIGH PRIEST. God knew we needed an example to show the way and inspire us to give it our all. That example and the title of High Priest is reserved for only one: Jesus the Christ. Only Jesus is the complete fulfillment of what it means and looks like to be called PRIEST; therefore, we are to look intently and passionately at Christ for our guidebook on how to live into our call to be and act priestly.

At the close of Jesus quoting Isaiah 61, Jesus offers these shocking words: **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”** (Luke 4:21). By stating that this passage has been fulfilled in their hearing, Jesus reveals how Isaiah’s new covenant promises are coming true. In Christ, we find a Spirit-anointed servant whose atonement for sin will produce sons and daughters that are simultaneously fellow priests. This is the vision of Isaiah, and when we read Jesus’s words and his ensuing calls for discipleship in light of Isaiah, we can see how the disciples are more than religious followers—they are a family of priests brought into the kingdom by the priestly ministry of Christ’s word.⁶

Christ the PRIEST- one who offers sacrifice on behalf of others and/or himself. Sacrifice was the way in which Jesus helped reveal God to others. He taught, embodied, and lived sacrifice in all his being and action. The priesthood of Jesus is expressed as the perfect priesthood, as Jesus is the perfect and only mediator between God and man. He is priest, offerer, and victim—the offered. His sacrifice is the perfect sacrifice, and his priesthood is eternal. The author of the book of Hebrews, called Jesus a High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 4:14). The word “priest” he uses, carries a couple of primary meanings. First, it means one who mediates in religious services. It also means one who is holy or set apart to perform those services. I think we can agree Jesus fulfills both of those meanings well 😊.

Connecting the dots: In the OT, we read that Abraham’s great-grandson Levi was singled out by God to be the father of the priestly tribe. When the Law was given on Mount Sinai, the Levites were identified as the servants of the Tabernacle, with the family of Aaron becoming the priests. The priests were responsible for making intercession to God for the people by offering the many sacrifices that the law required. Among the priests, one was selected as the High Priest, and he entered into the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement to place the blood of the sacrifice on the Ark of the Covenant. Hence the

book of Leviticus. By these daily and yearly sacrifices, the sins of the people were temporarily covered until the Messiah came to take away their sins.

Like Melchizedek, Jesus is ordained as a priest apart from the Law given on Mount Sinai. Like the Levitical priests, Jesus offered a sacrifice to satisfy the Law of God when He offered Himself for our sins. However, unlike the Levitical priests, who had to continually offer sacrifices, Jesus only had to offer His sacrifice once, gaining eternal redemption for all who come to God through Him.

Unlike the priestly sacrifices of all other priesthoods, Christ's priesthood is unique in that he is the priest, the offerer, and the victim, offered, at the same time. He offers himself upon the Altar of the Cross, as the sacrifice, whose primary effect is the atonement or forgiveness of sins. The sacrifice of Christ Jesus, the sinless lamb offered for our sins, is THE acceptable sacrifice to God.

Note: A sacrifice can be judged by the quality of that which is offered in sacrifice. An offering which is pure, undefiled, and of great worth is a greater sacrifice than that which is impure, defiled, and of little worth. Jesus, being the Son of God, is of ineffable and infinite value. Thus, his sacrifice is perfect, the one sacrifice which suffices for all humanity and all creation for all time.

Another important point to note is every priest is appointed from among men. What I think this means is we, as humanity, must acknowledge Jesus as our "Great High Priest", as the author of Hebrews claims in Hebrews. Jesus, though God from eternity, became a man in order to suffer death and serve as our High Priest. As a man, Jesus was subject to all the weaknesses and temptations that we are, so that He could personally relate to us in our struggles. And in his relating to us, what he was willing and able to go through as a man, what he taught as a man, what he embodied as a man, the faithfulness to God and the love for others he showed as a man, is what elevates him and sets him apart from other humans. Therefore, we are to look to and call Jesus our "Great High Priest".

I want to close with a few examples of Jesus embodying his role as priest for us. The scriptures are full of them and I will only touch the surface but here we go.

Teaching: Jesus's gospel of *the kingdom* is a message with a *priestly* center. Instead of bringing a message of political change, Jesus pronounces forgiveness of sins (Matt. 9:2; cf. Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10; etc.). Likewise, his ministry of teaching (Matt. 4:23–25; 9:35) reflects what priests did (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:9–11; 33:10; Mal. 2:6–7). Jesus's teaching separates those purified by faith from those defiled by unbelief (Matt. 15). All in all, when considering Jesus's ministry of the word, we should remember the role priests played in teaching, because in Jesus's teaching we discover that he is more than a prophet; he is also a priest.

Healing: Going beyond teaching, Matthew 8:1–4 recounts the time Jesus heals a leper. In Leviticus 13–14, God assigned priests to render a verdict on leprosy. Now something similar occurs in Matthew 8. Instead of issuing a judgment, however, Jesus puts his hands on the leper and makes him clean. Whereas lepers would defile anyone they touched under the old covenant—including priests—here Jesus, as the harbinger of the new covenant, communicates his cleanness to this man through physical touch. After Jesus’s heals this leper, he sends him to the priests. But why—what is the message Jesus wants this cleansed leper to bring to the priests? Namely, that a new priest is in town, and he has the power to make lepers clean. Jesus’s healing brings holiness.

Prayer: Jesus prays a lot. Jesus’s priestly ministry of prayer is seen when he raises his hands like the high priest of old to bless his people in Luke 24:50. Granted, this prayer occurs after his death and resurrection, but the point remains—Jesus blesses his people like a priest.

How is Christ the PRIEST inspiring you and your life today? Is it in the loving sacrifice of time and care to clean a child’s feet and buy them a pair of shoes and socks? Is it in the sacrifice of something valuable given up to obtain the spirit and essence and purpose of something greater? Is it in your own bold confidence to know that Christ the Priest is there for you, with you, and has, and is, and will always be willing to do anything it takes for you to nestle up close with God and feel God’s loving embrace?