

1 Peter 2:2-10

Easter 5A Midweek + May 17, 2017

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

Infants and Priests

The Word of the Lord from 1 Peter 2:2-3: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

When Teresa and I were expecting our first child, we signed up for the local Lamaze class to prepare us for the experience of childbirth. I don't remember much, but this sticks with me: in one of the videos we watched, a baby boy was placed on his mother's abdomen; and after a moment or two, he started doing his very best to reach her breast and nurse. His instinct and desire for his mother's milk was extraordinary. He didn't show any skepticism or wonder if his mother would bill him later. His earliest attitude seemed to be, "I need milk. Mom has milk, and I trust that that milk is for me."

That video clip always comes to mind when I hear St. Peter say, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." The milk is the Word of God; and as children of God, our God-given faith is saying, "I need forgiveness. The Lord has forgiveness, and I trust that forgiveness is for me." And as sure as that baby zeroed in on his mother's breast, you know exactly where the Lord provides forgiveness for you – it's in His Word.

It is no coincidence that Jesus is called the Word made flesh: as God works to save through His Word, so He saves you through His Son, Jesus Christ. When you hear the Word, you hear Jesus Himself. When you believe the Word, you have Jesus Himself. And as Jesus says in our Gospel lesson, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus doesn't say, "I will *show* you the way to truth and life." He says, "I *am* all three." Believing in Jesus isn't the first step on a long path towards salvation; if you have Jesus, you have salvation. And where does Jesus give you Himself and all of His gifts? In His Word.

As eager as that infant was for his mother's milk, so also should we be eager to hear and meditate upon the Word of God. Yet too often, daily devotions and gathering for worship fall by the wayside. We can give a host of reasons why we don't long for the Word: it might be the demands of work, the opportunities for fun, all the things we have to get done, or the smug feeling that we know enough to be saved and further Bible study is a waste of time. Whatever the excuse, behind it lurks this somber warning: "For those who do not believe, 'the stone that the builders rejected [namely, Jesus] has become the cornerstone,' and [to them Jesus is] 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.'" I'm assuming you're here because you're a believer, but your old sinful flesh is not; and as long as your old Adam clings to you, it will use whatever it can to get you to neglect the Word of God.

When you do so, repent; and rejoice to be infants who long for the Word. Rejoice too that the Lord compares you to infants: for the joy of being an infant is that everything you have is given to you. The Lord does not require you to do great things to earn the forgiveness Jesus has won: instead, He gives it to you as freely as He has given life to a newborn.

Rejoice also that the Lord doesn't stop with calling you infants. Among other things in this passage, He calls you priests: "You are ... a royal priesthood," He declares, and I'd like to

zero in on that to clarify the joy of what He says, because this verse has so often been misused to cause a fair amount of trouble.

The misuse is this: some will argue that a priest and a pastor are the same thing. Therefore, if all Christians are priests, then all Christians are pastors. If the pastor is hogging all the glory in the service and won't let other people do pastor things like preaching the sermon or leading the liturgy, he's abusing his office and depriving people of their God-given rights to do so.

But a priest is not the same thing as a pastor. If they are the same, why don't we call pastors "priests"? Here's the big difference: the primary task of the priest is to offer sacrifices to God. You find this throughout the Old Testament: if people wanted or needed to make a sacrifice, they would take the animal to the priest. The priest would preside over the sacrifice, and he would present it to God. Once a year, the high priest would go a step further: after several sacrifices were made, he would enter the Holy of Holies, the inner room of the temple where the Lord dwelt on earth. On behalf of all the people, he would present the blood of a sacrifice to the Lord, and the Lord would forgive their sins. All of this work pointed toward Jesus, who – as our high priest – offered the sacrifice for sin (Himself on the cross!) and presented that sacrifice to His Father for our salvation.

In a nutshell then, here's the work of the priest: to make sacrifices on behalf of the people and come into God's presence. The primary movement is from people to God.

With pastors, it's the opposite: the primary movement of their calling is from God to people. Pastors are called, first and foremost, to take the gifts of God (won by Jesus on the cross) and give them to the people. In our sermons, we declare His forgiveness and life. In baptism, we give Jesus' death and resurrection to the baptized. In the Lord's Supper, we deliver Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. We might better say that the Lord is giving these things through pastors. It's not like we have any special powers, either: if a three-year-old tells me that Jesus forgives me, it's just as much an absolution as when a pastor says it. Pastors don't have special powers. The reason they normally do these things is because they've been called into the office.

All of this is to say that priests and pastors are not the same thing. Pastors bring gifts from God to His people, while priests bring sacrifices on behalf of the people to God.

You are priests, members of a royal priesthood. This means that it is given to you to offer sacrifices and to come into the presence of God.

But what sort of sacrifices are you to offer? You're not going to make the sacrifice for sin: you can't anyway, and Jesus already made that sacrifice for you on the cross. You're not going to go back to sacrificing animals like the Old Testament priests, because all of those pointed to Jesus, and we're not to make those sacrifices anymore.

So what is left for you to offer? What are your "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?" What joy you have as priests! All that's left for you to offer are sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. You offer sacrifices of praise by declaring what God has done: you declare it here with your fellow priests, and to others in the world as the opportunity arises. You offer sacrifices of thanksgiving because *the* Sacrifice has been made. You are redeemed – your sin is atoned for. There are no works to be done for your salvation, because Christ has done it all. All that is left to do is say thanks.

These sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving spill out into all that you do. As you live a life of praise because of what God has done, you go about your life doing what God has given you to

do. If He has given you to be married, then you love and cherish your spouse. If He's given you children, then you love and instruct them. If He's made you a citizen, you pray for your rulers and seek the good of your neighbor; if He's made you a worker, then you work hard at your labors. Because you're set free from sin, you're set free to do what God has created you to do: thus all your good works throughout the day are sacrifices of thanks and praise.

And always remember: they are acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ*. Because Jesus' blood cleanses you of sin, your works are offerings pleasing to God.

Which brings us back to where we started: your works are sacrifices acceptable to God because Jesus has taken your sins away, and He delivers that forgiveness through His Word. Neglect the Word, and your works are no longer pleasing to God because *you* are no longer pleasing to God. Repent and long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word ... because by it you will grow up into salvation.

Because the Lord *is* good.

Repent. Rejoice. Be infants and priests, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen