

**10.06.24 ~ Pentecost 20**  
**“Priesthood of All Believers”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Genesis 8:20-22** <sup>NLT</sup>

*Tell the story of the arc:* The floodwaters began to recede, so Noah sent out a raven. Then he sent a dove out three times (first time could not land so returned) to see if the land was dry enough for them. The second time the dove returned with a fresh olive leaf in its beak, they waited another seven days. The third time the dove did not return. So God told Noah to empty the boat of people and animals to be fruitful and multiply the earth . . .

<sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. <sup>21</sup> And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. <sup>22</sup> As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day, and night.”

**Leader: This Sacrifice Assured God’s Covenant with Noah.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**1 Peter 2:5-9** <sup>NLT</sup>

<sup>5</sup> And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. <sup>6</sup> As the Scriptures say,

“I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem,  
chosen for great honor,  
and anyone who trusts in him  
will never be disgraced.”

<sup>7</sup> Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him,

“The stone that the builders rejected  
has now become the cornerstone.”

<sup>8</sup> And,

“He is the stone that makes people stumble,  
the rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

**Leader: These words are why we remember Jesus through Communion.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Almighty God, you are our creator and ultimate priest. We communicate with you directly through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. You called us to yourself as believers and kingdom co-laborers. For all we have experienced today and in life, even the difficult parts, we give you thanks. We seek you daily for your comfort, strength, stamina, healing, and inspiration. Through you, we discover grace, truth, and salvation. Then we share those same things with others. Help us to reflect on the ordinance of communion together. May we live into our calling to be your hands and feet in this world. We remember your sacrifice, we praise you and ask you to refresh us to serve in the coming weeks. Let us listen as we study, in Jesus' name. Amen.

---

A former NOAA scientist calculated the recent rains east of the Mississippi over 5 days and found it to be 40 trillion gallons! That is the size of 60 million Olympic sized swimming pools. We have no volume calculation of rain in Noah's day, but we do know from Scripture that the heaviest rains were 40 days and 40 nights and a total of 150 days of rain. This passage was not selected for comparison, but Noah was one of the early "priests" (if we Baptists will allow the title in a broad sense) who offered a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord in worship and thanksgiving.

God punished humankind's early sin of murder and idolatry by flooding the earth, but he remembered Noah and his family. Noah was an obedient man, holy, and willing to follow God's direction, even though he was probably ridiculed for his devotion. Noah's strong faith sustained him; he first sent the raven for safety and then the dove. Seven days later, he sent the dove back out and he brought back an olive leaf proving there was dry land somewhere; a peaceful offering was brought not by a bird of prey but by a humble bird given in offerings; over the years, that branch has become a symbol of peace and hope. The third time the dove was sent out, after another seven days to allow the waters to recede more, he did not come back, for the dove had found a new home, a new nesting place.

Noah built an altar to thank God for saving him, his family, the many creatures, and the entire earth. He had brought along animals specifically for sacrifice, and God found the fragrance pleasing. God reciprocated by saying that rather than judgment I will never again destroy humans for sin. We can observe the changing seasons in our part of the world to remind us that out of abundant summer comes fall, and from that death or dormancy of winter comes spring, new life, and the cycle of life continues. We know too that in God's mercy and grace, he would send us a savior, his son, Jesus, the ultimate priest. He became our hope, and you remember how the dove appeared at Jesus' baptism, the dove, our symbol of peace and hope.

Last month we learned how the ordinances pertain to worship as memorials of Christ's crucifixion on the sacrificial cross and his resurrection from the grave. Christ was rejected by men even though God had chosen him. Perhaps our flawed natures make it hard to relate to the perfect Jesus, but his loving spirit and words of forgiveness on the cross help us to accept him as our Savior. His whole life as we read in the Scriptures, both prophecy and history, demonstrates grace, humility, and love, all qualities we wish to have or to experience. In his letters, the Apostle Peter used the metaphor of "Living Stone" to describe Jesus as Messiah and Christ. Here, he redeems himself after being such a skeptical disciple when Jesus was alive and shortly after the crucifixion. As we try to become more like Jesus in thought, word, and deed, let us remember that we are members of his kingdom, a Holy priesthood ("And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. Isaiah 61:6.") Peter also used Isaiah 28:16 to show that Christ is our foundation, the

living support of our faith, and therefore as believers, we carry on his divine priesthood through our human efforts: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.”)

In today’s passage, Peter draws a clear distinction between those who believe and those who do not. The “chosen people” used to only be the men of Israel, but since Jesus, it means both Jewish and Gentile believers. Moses was told by the Lord, in Exodus 19:6: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” but for Christ, as Peter says, now all Christians are “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Although the words of prophecy, Peter’s followers are to be new witnesses of God’s grace and glory through Jesus and a triune God. Jesus is the ultimate high priest because he “performs and transmits the divine sacraments while, at the same time, establishing the Congregation of the New Testament, even though he never attributed to himself the term ‘priest’ [[online](#) source].”

According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus is a higher priest than Aaron or any Levitical priests; he likens him to priest-king Melchizedek. And as for us, he writes in Romans 12:1 asking all Christian siblings to present your bodies, as living sacrifice, dedicating your whole life to God and his kingdom. Christ’s “transfer” (*if you will*) of priestliness comes through our faith and how we live it out in the world. That is for **all** believers, not just clergy. Yes, the Adamic covenant was first and broken; Noah’s covenant we discussed was next; then the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 19:3-8: God asked for obedience, and the people agreed that “All the Lord asked we will do.” But we know they failed here too. There were covenants with

Abraham and David until Jesus died on the cross, and his sacrificial blood became the new covenant. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we take time to confess our own sins and renew our belief, the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 22, verse 20, we hear <sup>20</sup> Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

The phrase "Priesthood of the Believer" is an important Baptist distinctive that comes out of Soul Freedom. I read here from Baptist theologian and authority Walter B. Shurden. His book, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* states on page 117:

Every person is competent to go directly to God for forgiveness through repentance and faith. That person needs neither individual nor church to dispense salvation. There is but one mediator of God and people, Jesus Christ our Lord. After one has become a Christian, one has direct access to God through Christ. The Christian has entered into a royal priesthood and is privileged to minister for Christ to all. Christians are to share with them the faith they cherish and to serve them in the name and spirit of their Lord. The priesthood of believers, therefore, means that all members serve as equals under God in the fellowship of a local church. Each Christian, having direct access to God through Christ, is his or her own priest and is also under obligation to become a priest for Christ on behalf of other persons.

Shurden wrote an extensive examination of this doctrine in another book just on this doctrine, but let me summarize it for you. "The new priesthood . . . is no longer based on heredity or ordination or office, but on personal relationship to Jesus Christ and on the gifts that He distributes to all his people (p 138)." We are to apply this calling by offering our faith to all. Even if your gift is not evangelism, we can live out our priesthood through other gifts like hospitality, generosity, caring

for others, prayer, and sharing communion together. We have studied spiritual gifts before; I encourage you to go back to 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 in this new context of “royal priesthood.” If you read these in prayer, you may discern something new for your own calling and ministries. If you believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, you (we) have a responsibility to accept this calling as a royal priesthood with great humility and encouragement.

Today, the clergy may read the words of the institution for the Lord’s Supper, but you as a holy people, accept this memorial feast in the spirit of the Lord’s forgiveness described earlier. Amen? Amen! ||  
**Let us pray.** Dear Lord, we thank you today for this instruction to re-align ourselves with you and your direction through Scripture. Encourage our flawed natures to trust you and your calling in our lives and ministries. Empower us to be evangelists in the style of gifting you provided. Guide our thoughts and actions to draw others and ourselves closer to you as we serve in community together. May we find recommitment and beauty in our holy communion together. Please bless these elements as we remember your sacrifice and devote our whole lives to you once again. Jesus, it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**