

What Happens Here Doesn't Stay Here Priesthood of Believers

April 18, 2015

We are doing this two-part series because we believe it is vital to our vision and growth here at Florida Hospital SDA Church. In fact, we feel it is so important that, of all the things we talk about in our New Membership Orientation class, these two are what we highlight the most when becoming new members.

The two expectations that we have are: 1st - Living lives of authenticity, which Andy spoke on last week, and 2nd - Living your life knowing that you are a part of a royal priesthood of believers.

Prayer

Growing up in our small church in Wisconsin, I can remember many times looking up over the edge of the pew in front of me and watching as those four men, all dressed in black suits, marched in slowly to those slow, droning chords on the organ. There were actually five chairs up on the platform, but the center more elaborate chair was used only about once a month, when the pastor came to speak. The rest of the time it sat empty, reserved only for the Ordained Man of God.

As young boy, I could see that this whole church thing was pretty ostentatious. You could be a normal person during the week, but when you got to church and stepped inside that little room up in the front, you came out holier and much closer to God than the rest of us. I was never allowed in that room, or even up on the platform for that matter. The ground floor was as close to God as I got back then.

One day, my mom and I made a special trip to the church during the week. She had to drop off the bulletins from the printer, and I just happened to be with her that day. She went downstairs to drop them off and take care of something while I was somewhat free to wander around the church. It wasn't long before I found myself up in the "Sanctuary," as we called it. I immediately saw the little grey folding door up on the right, and I was drawn to it as if it held some kind of mysterious supernatural power behind that otherwise simple door.

I walked slowly over to it, and noticed I that whoever was there last hadn't latched it tightly enough to close. I peered in through the opening but couldn't see anything in the darkness. But I didn't want to give up; it was like this was my only chance to see the Holy of Holies! I found my fingers prying into that small crack and wedging it open just enough to squeeze into that room. There was a little light coming from the other doorway leading up to the platform, but for the most part, I still couldn't see a lot. I began wondering, Will I see God? Will I somehow get transformed? Will the church like me more?

Just then my mom came in and flipped the light on. “What are you doing in here?” she asked as she set a box of black square letters and numbers down on a small shelf. I was so startled, I didn’t even know what to say, and she could certainly tell that I had that look like I was up to something. “Nothing,” I blurted quite sheepishly, not wanting to tell her that I was actually looking for the Shekinah glory of the Raymond Church. “Well, this is no place to be fooling around young man,” she scolded while she sorted the numbers.

“Oh I know,” I said as I started to notice how small the room seemed and actually how messy it was. My mom started putting the new hymn numbers for next Sabbath up on the old oak wall plaque while I became less and less enchanted with what I expected this “holy place” to be. There really was nothing mysterious or awesome about it. It was just a small messy room that was used to store old stuff and remind people how to sit when they went up on the platform. In my little mind that afternoon, all of a sudden some things started to be put together. My mom and dad had always taught me that Christ dwells in us. That he is not in a building, but in our hearts. All of a sudden, it started to dawn on me – the things we think are so special are just things, normal things made with normal stuff. We don’t become special because we go into a room, or we sit in a special chair. We are not holier because we belong to a church, or if we go through the seminary, or even if we were born a male. What makes us all special is God, who said, “You are all my heirs because you believe in me.”

1 Peter 2:9

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Christ’s plan was simple: Disciples of Christ were to disciple someone else to become a disciple, and on and on it would go.

However, it didn’t take long after the apostles were gone for some who were leading out in the church to become a bit frustrated with all of the various factions that were cropping up in the church. Soon there was a call for more centrality and a standardizing of the doctrines that seemed to be threatened by the ever-growing numbers of people joining the church. The role of leadership changed as the “grassroots” style of teaching people about Christ gave way to a more clergy-led style of authority.

At first, this plan seemed quite sensible. The role of priest was now in the hands of one man who was over a parish of people. He would teach them, and he would lead them. During the Middle Ages, as fewer and fewer people were able to read, all of the responsibility for spiritual learning and worship leading fell to the appointed clergy. As time went on, nothing was left for the common person, while more and more power and leverage was given to those who could posture themselves in positions of authority.

At the height of this polarity between clergy and laity, the King James Bible had its beginning. It was quite an undertaking, yet at the time it was certainly the best that Christendom could hope for. (Take some time to study the history and origin of the King James Version of the Bible.)

Ephesians 4:11-13

11And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **12**For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **13**Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Reflecting the culture of the church – In 1604 when the work was started on King James's new Bible project, the entire western world was now powerfully controlled by monarchies and high-ranking church leaders, and many times no one knew who exactly was the more politically powerful of the two.

In reading this, it may look as though Paul is saying that this holy hierarchy should do everything:

It is the role of the Clergy for:

The perfecting of the saints

The work of ministry

The building up of the body of Christ

However, the Reformation was going to make new strides in how we looked at these Scriptures and how, eventually, they would shape our view of ministry. These strides were more in keeping with what Jesus said to his disciples: If we don't proclaim this gospel, the rocks will do it, and many texts like that. It would be more in line with what Peter, Luke, John and even Paul himself in other Scriptures said about all of us being living sacrifices who bear witness of God. Later versions of the Bible began to phrase this text differently. Look now at how the NIV reads:

Ephesians 4:11-13

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The word used for what the KJV translated "Perfecting" and what the NIV revised to say "Equipping" is actually a Greek word meaning to "Set Straight" or

“Reposition.” This would be much like how a doctor takes a broken arm and sets it back to its intended function.

This is what Paul said was the work of those appointed, but all of us share in the responsibility of bringing and sharing the Good News.

So now that we’ve established that it is up to all of us, and that it is one of our expectations as members of this church, just what exactly does this mean – to share the Good News?

I was taking a class at Andrews University. It was entitled “Evangelism 101.” I still remember our first assignment: to read John, Chapter 4, and write down how we saw the four principals Evangelism played out in the chapter.

Win their trust
Seek to understand them
Share your testimony
Invite them to learn the truth

Chapter 4 is the story when Jesus was walking with his friends to Samaria. The Samaritans had been at odds with each other for centuries. Some might have said that they hated each other more than they both hated the Romans. Yet even with the immense distain, the Jews traveled in and out of their towns as a way of getting from one region to another.

However, a Jew would never sit down and have a conversation with a Samaritan. But that is exactly what Jesus did.

While the disciples went into town to get a bite to eat, Jesus stayed on the outskirts by the well. While he was waiting, he began talking with a woman, a Samaritan woman. (To a Jew, she would be the lowest of the low).

Of course, right away I noticed Jesus’ tactics. He lowered himself to talk with the woman. How good does that get? Of course he won her trust. Then he started asking question, about her to seek to understand her.

There is the banter that goes on between the woman and Jesus - nothing cruel, but somewhat sharp. She knew how Jews felt about her, and she knew how men in general had treated her in the past. She had become wise to the arrogance of men, so in a sense, maybe she was at a point in her life where she really felt she had nothing to lose. You could see a feisty spirit in her, a spirit that no longer needed to back down.

As I read through this story as a young “theologian,” I tried hard to see the colorations as if I was matching items on a grade school worksheet. This one goes with this one, and this one goes with this one.

I tried to make all the right verses fit the four main points, but I still had this wonderment in the back of my mind. Did Jesus really use “tactics?” Was he just following a formula for evangelism that he could teach in a class? Was she just “Exhibit A” on how to work with Samaritan females?

I finished my paper, and I got an A. After the class that semester, we all felt like we could go out and use Jesus’ Method of Evangelism on anyone.

But can I share a deeper part of this story?

No I don’t believe this a story on how to use Christ’s Tactics of Evangelism.

If you read deeper into the story – you find an interesting insight as to how Jesus looks at us. Every time this woman tried to sink back in the age-old dispute between their families of origin, Jesus revealed more of who he was to her, until finally he says to her – “Go get your husband.”

Defensively she blurts, “I’m not married,” knowing that truth was far less painful to admit than the “other one.”

Jesus now reveals even more of himself. “That’s a great way to word that, ‘I’m not married,’ as you’ve had five husbands, and you’re not married to the one you’re currently living with.”

If this were any other conversation with any other man, this woman would have been gone with a few choice words on the way out. But she doesn’t; she stays – because Jesus has done something to her. He had entrusted her with the Good News. You can see her fears subsiding. One more time she deflects, “Look these are old arguments. I don’t know who’s right, but one thing I do know is that the Messiah is coming, and when he gets here, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus tells her, “I am the Messiah.”

It says in vs. 27 that just then his disciples arrived. They were surprised to find him talking to a woman, but none of them asked him why or what they had been discussing.

And so, with perfect timing, the disciples come stumbling in, “What are you talking to her for?” “Hey we had some great trout in town; you should have come.” “Aren’t you hungry?”

And the woman slipped away. However, you get this picture that she’s smiling all the way back to her house. Jesus had not only entrusted her with this wonderful news, he had empowered her to finally see that she had value, she had worth –

she was starting to become a believer. She didn't know it yet, but she was also a part of a royal priesthood.

While I was going over this story this week, I finally realized why I was so conflicted when I took that Evangelism 101 class. We aren't Jesus. Sure, we can try to emulate his grace, love, acceptance and forgiveness. But in this story, we are the woman. We are *her*. I know that's bad grammar, but we are! We are the ones who have heard that he is the Messiah, and now we get to share the Good News. We are the ones who now get to tell others where he is.

John 4:28-30 Message

In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?" And they went out to see for themselves.

We are all a part of this royal priesthood, just like a Samaritan woman who might have been despised in her own town. Jesus uses all of us who choose to believe. All he asks is that we share the GOOD NEWS.

He's empowered you to be a part of this great work. I love what happens when the town comes out. You can almost see the mouths dropping as the disciples wonder what happened when they were away.

It says:

John 4:39-42

³⁹⁻⁴² Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Savior of the world!"

Christ said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men on to me."

You want to see others see Christ –

We have two expectations

1. Be Authentic in your walk with Christ
2. Believe in your calling of a Royal Priesthood

TAKE *away* →

4.18.15

1. What might keep you from admitting that you are just as viable a "priest" as the clergy in your church?
2. What role does a pastor or an evangelist play in your Christian experience, and how is it different from another member of the church?
3. Many people today feel that they would rather "go it alone," and make the Christian journey just a "Jesus and Me Journey." What would you say to someone who sees Christian life this way?
4. Why do you think Florida Hospital Church puts so much emphasis on helping everyone understand that they are truly a part of a Royal Priesthood of Believers?

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