

10/26/17

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During October, I will be using devotions that were written for Reformation 2017 for Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. The devotional booklet is entitled: "I Shall Not Die, But Live."

But 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. (1 Peter 2:9)

Harold stepped into the pulpit and addressed the congregation. "I am not a pastor," Harold said. "I never studied at a seminary. I've raised cotton, and now I work for an association of cotton growers. I am not a professional preacher or public speaker. I don't generally get up in front of other people and give talks. So, I'm rather nervous about standing up here this morning. In fact, if I weren't behind this pulpit, you could see my knees knocking!"

That was how Harold began his message on a Sunday when the pastor was away. The church was a small congregation, far from any others of its synod. When the pastor was traveling to a national meeting or other obligations, church council members would lead Sunday services. Harold's message on this day focused on words from the apostle Peter: "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."

"All God's people are priests," Harold continued. "Priests have the right to approach God directly; we are welcome in God's presence. Through Jesus Christ we all 'have access to the Father by one Spirit' (Ephesians 2:18). When we were baptized, we became part of the priesthood of all believers in Jesus. That gives us the privilege of approaching God 'with freedom and confidence' (Ephesians 3:12), and also the privilege to proclaim Christ to the world. We declare the praises of the Lord, who brought us out of darkness and into the light, who rescued us from death and gave us life. We all share in that gospel mission."

The Reformation reaffirmed the truth that all God's people are equal members of God's kingdom, a universal priesthood of those who pray and proclaim in the name of Jesus.

Martin Luther wrote: "If a group of pious Christians settled in a wilderness and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if they were to agree to choose one from their own midst to baptize, give communion, announce forgiveness and preach, such a man would be as truly a priest as he would be if all bishops and popes had consecrated him. This is why anyone may baptize and give absolution in case of necessity, which would be impossible if we were not all priests."

Harold fulfilled such a role in his congregation in the pastor's absence. Each of God's people fulfills a more general role of worship and witness in everyday life. God's Spirit is with all of his people—all of his priests—as we come to him in prayer and go for him to others, with news of his grace.

Prayer: *Jesus our Lord, we praise you for what you have done for us. Embolden all of us as your people—a royal priesthood—to come to you for blessing and to speak for you, extending your blessing to others. Amen.*

Rev. David Sellnow (NWC '82, WLS '86) serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology, philosophy, and history.

...See you in church.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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