

## “The Priesthood of All Believers”

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Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Spiritual gifts series

Themes: Spiritual gifts, ministry

Texts: 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:21-31

Have you ever considered yourself a minister? Well, it may come as a surprise to you that you are. The writer of the letter named for Peter identifies the followers of Jesus as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation.” (1 Peter 2:9) One of the primary affirmations of the Protestant Reformation is the priesthood of all believers.

And the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* declares that “all Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God.” (1989, p. 89) Do you know what that means?

You *are* a minister. As a follower of Christ each and every one of us is called to active service in Christ’s ministry in the world. And that’s true whether you wear a collar or you sit in a pew on Sunday morning, whether you are a clergy person or a layperson.

That’s also true whether you know the Bible inside and out, or you hardly know the Bible at all. All of us are called, and that includes you! Even if you are not an ordained clergy person, you are a minister.

You have been called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to serve as Christ in places where you find the greatest joy and the deepest connection to God’s people. God calls us all to serve so that the body of Christ fulfills its calling in this world.

Some persons are called to ordination. This is the process by which some people are set apart to lead the church in its ministry of witness and service. In the UMC, these persons are ordained to word, sacrament and

order as elders, or to ministries of love, justice and service as deacons. However, those who are not called to ordination are not off the hook!

*Every* follower of Christ has been given spiritual gifts to fulfill God's calling for his or her servanthood. Our individual calling is always a part of God's mission for the church. We cannot fulfill our individual calling without being a part of the Christian community. That's the way God ordered it.

So how does it feel to hear that you are called to ministry as a disciple of Jesus? Are you excited to get going? Are you feeling inadequate, unprepared and unqualified? Maybe you're feeling offended, believing that you hire a minister to do all that work and he must be lazy by suggesting that the lay people have to share in the ministry of the church.

I've heard all of these reactions. If you're feeling any of that, you're not alone. But Scripture, tradition, reason and experience tell us that one person cannot do it all. Listen to this quote from author Stephen Verney:

"The laity had come to see, with a shock, that they were the front line soldiers of the Church. They, not the clergy, were the representatives who were actually present in the factories, shops, offices, schools and homes of the country. If Christ's compassion was to get into those situations, then they, the laity, must be the channels through which it would come. If Christ's truth was to be spoken, then they must speak it."

You can be in places that I will never be. You will meet people in your daily lives that I will never meet. You will have opportunities to share the love of Christ, to pray, to serve, to help people that I will never have. Plus, it is not healthy for any organization to be totally dependent on one person doing everything. It's not healthy for the organization, or for that person.

That is why Paul uses the image of the body as a metaphor to describe the Church. We are one body made up of many different parts,

each with something to offer. Each of us unique, each of us gifted in certain ways, but all of us called by God to be in ministry. Your baptism into Christ is your commissioning into ministry. All baptized members of the body of Christ are meant to be ministers, in some way, using the gifts that God has given them.

A cute story: One day the parts of the body were arguing with each other about who should be in charge. After all the debating it came down to the eyes and the mouth. The eyes insisted they should be in charge because the body couldn't see where it was going without them.

The mouth protested, claiming it was greatest, because not only was it used to communicate the needs of the body, but it was the medium through which the body received nourishment. All of the other body parts started to take sides, all except the bladder.

It remained quiet and just closed up. It simply refused to function. After a couple of days the eyes began to tear up and the teeth began to float. Soon the eyes and the mouth cried out to the bladder, "We give up! You're the boss!"

Well, this is simply a story and is certainly not accurate scientifically, but you get the point. When one part of the body shuts down, the whole body suffers. The apostle Paul used this analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 to illustrate how the human body best works together. Likewise, in the Body of Christ, all of the members of the church are needed for the Body of Christ to function well. Paul also made it abundantly clear, that when one part of the body suffers, or refuses to do its job, the whole body is affected.

Here at Lakewood we are blessed to have so many people who are willing to share their gifts and talents in a variety of ways. I had several people approach me after last week's presentation by the committee chair-

persons that they were amazed at all the things going on in this church, even people who have attended for years. One person quoted an African proverb and said, "It really does take a village." I took it they meant, "We all need to do our part, and it's amazing how many people are involved."

We are blessed to have an active and vibrant church. One of you told me after the Lakewood Park Party that a friend of yours complimented Lakewood on remaining so active and alive. They attend a different church and the situation isn't quite as hopeful there.

If Lakewood is to remain an active, healthy, vibrant church for years to come, we need to keep renewing ourselves. Some of you have served on the same committee for a number of years and you wonder if you'll have to do this the rest of your life. Guess what, it may be time for you to step away, and consider serving in a different way. Renew yourself.

Some of you are new to Lakewood. Perhaps you served in another church, but you haven't gotten involved here. Guess what, it may be time for you to volunteer for service. Claim your gifts and share with someone, "I've got experience serving on the SPRC committee. I could do that again." "I'm pretty handy with tools, I'd be glad to serve on the Trustees." "I took the spiritual gifts inventory, and it was confirmed for me that my gift is in the area of hospitality. How can that gift be used at Lakewood?"

Friends, we are in the beginning stages of the nominating process, recruiting servants and leaders for next year. You could really help us by letting us know where you'd like to serve. You could really help us by answering the phone when someone calls you. It's really discouraging when someone from the Lay Leadership Committee calls and calls and calls, leaving messages, and the person never returns their call.

At least listen to the ministry position you are being offered. Pray about it, and if it's not your calling, politely decline, or offer to serve in a different way.

Let me close by sharing a little parable. I think you'll find it humorous and you'll get the point, I'm sure. It's simply called, "Somebody."

"Fred Somebody, Thomas Everybody, Susan Anybody and Sally Nobody were neighbors. But they were not like you and me. They were odd people and most difficult to get along with. The way they lived was a shame

All four belonged to the same church, but you wouldn't have enjoyed worshiping there. EVERYBODY went fishing on Sunday, or stayed home to visit with friends. ANYBODY wanted to worship but was afraid SOMEBODY wouldn't speak to EVERYBODY. So, guess who went to church? NOBODY

Really, NOBODY was the only decent one in the group. NOBODY did the visitation. NOBODY worked on the church building. NOBODY came to all the church functions. NOBODY helped on the ministry teams.

Once they needed a Sunday school teacher. EVERYBODY thought ANYBODY would do it. And NOBODY thought SOMEBODY would do it. And do you know who did it? That's exactly right. NOBODY did it."

Beloved in Christ, all of us are ministers. By virtue of our baptism we are commissioned to ministry, even if we don't wear a clerical collar. Martin Luther referred to it as the priesthood of all believers. The Apostle Paul reminds us that all of the parts of the body are needed for the body to function well.

If we each use the gift or talent God has given us, we will help the Kingdom to grow. And in the process Lakewood will remain a vibrant church. Let us pray:

“Lord, I pray that you might reveal your purpose for me and show me the path that you want me to take. Please show me with clarity the gifts that you have given me to share with others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

The introduction to today’s sermon is borrowed from James Harnish’s daily workbook entitled “*A Disciples Path*,” Abingdon Press, 2012, pp. 80-81