THE PRIESTHOOD HAS CHANGED

May 14, 2017 1 Peter 2:2-10

Dear Friends in Christ: Because of the Scandal of Particularity, we Gentiles who believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world have been elevated to the position once held by the Israelites of old.

Peter echoes the words of God to Moses recorded in Exodus 19 where God says that these people are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. Meaning at that time of course, the new nation God created in Egypt.

But Peter’s words are directed toward those whom the Holy Spirit has called to faith in Jesus Christ, who is the promised Messiah, the One rejected by His own people, the Jews.

In the days of the OT, God set up His church with the Priests as the leaders and go-between for the people. The people brought their sacrifices to the priests who then offered them to God on behalf of the person bringing the sacrifice for sins. This they had to do as often as they came to worship.

This sacrifice for sin was a forshadowing of the one perfect sacrifice God would one day send. They did this believing that God would keep His word. This is called faith.

Over time the expectations of the people changed. Their attitude toward God changed and they, in essence, left the faith to worship the false gods of their neighbors. You know the story. God sent prophet after prophet, telling the people to come back to the true God------or else.

Most did not listen. The ten tribes are destroyed by the Assyrians in about 722 B.C. The other 2 tribes don’t fare any better and ate attacked and destroyed in about 587 B.C. The temple is destroyed, ending official worship of God by the 12 tribes who have ceased to exist.

But God has not abandoned His disobedient people. He keeps His promise and a remnant returns to Jerusalem from Babylon after 70 years. The prophets, ending with John the Baptist, continue to tell the people that someone is coming to take away the sin of the world.

According to Acts 6, as the new church was growing daily, even many of the priests became obedient to this new faith in Jesus Christ.

But now, the temple and its sacrifices are gone. Jesus came as the one perfect sacrifice for sin. No more are needed. And there is one event that occurred after Jesus was crucified. The heavy curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. This curtain separated the holy of holies from the main part of the temple and only the high priest could go in there to offer a sacrifice for sin for the people-----once a year.

This signified that the priesthood of the Old Testament was over. God was now approachable by all who believe.

This is why Peter says in our text-----you yourselves are like living stones being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God thru Jesus Christ.

We are the spiritual priesthood of all believers who offer the spiritual sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Paul tells us to offer ourselves as spiritual sacrifices to God.

The Jews rejected, for the most part, the Son of God when He came into the world. Now, they, like everyone else in the world, must believe in Jesus in order to be saved from sin, eternal death and hell.

Now, in verse 9, Peter sets the record straight for all to hear. Speaking to Christians everywhere he says: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Remember Jesus saying in John 10 about a week before Palm Sunday: “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice.” We are the other sheep. We are Gentiles, not Jews.

This has all happened according to God’s plan to save mankind from sin. As a priesthood of believers, it is therefore our joyous duty to witness to others about our great and wonderful God who has saved us.

On this Mother’s Day we thank all Christian mothers who witnessed to their children. Taught them how to pray, read Bible stories to them and introduced them to Jesus. This is how we pass on to the next generation what is of first importance. And parents never stop praying for their children.

So, I would have you take this home today. We, the people of God, are the church; living stones who are built on the chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. We have been chosen by God thru Holy Baptism to be His own possession. In Baptism, all sins have been forgiven and we come to church to offer here our spiritual sacrifice of prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

We have been blessed to be a blessing.