

Call to Worship

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness. (Ps 96:8-9)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 66:8-12

Prayer of confession

Loving Father,

In the safety of your love, we confess that we call you Lord but have not let you be Lord.

But now Lord, put us to grand things or humble things, whatever is to your glory.

We call you Lord but shrink from the cost of discipleship.

But now Lord, put us to hardship or times of blessing, whatever is to your glory.

We call you Lord but sometimes we doubt,

But now Lord, put us to times of perseverance in which we see your glory.

We call you Lord but seek our own high status.

But now Lord, put us to your will and with who you will for your glory.

We call you Lord but do not seek your counsel.

But now Lord, put us to the quest of learning, that we might understand your glory.

We call you Lord but want so much for ourselves.

But now Lord, put us with plenty, put us with nothing, whatever is to your glory

We pray this prayer knowing we cannot live it without your love and empowering presence in our lives. Amen

Assurance of forgiveness

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Confession

Jesus is incomparably awesome, entirely forgiving, amazingly humble and uniquely caring. He is accessible to the sinner, ennobling of the meek, enriching of the poor and empowering to the weak.

He is a harbinger of hope, a bringer of justice, a giver of eternal reward and a guarantee of God's victory.

He is a rescuer to those who are lost, a teacher to all those who seek, a light to all those in darkness and a shepherd for all who stray.

He is the bringer of truth, the enemy of evil, the example for us all and the gateway to God.

He is unique as our creator, unique in sustaining all life, unique as our saviour and unique as the expression of God's love.

And so we honour you and bless your name today.

Holy Communion

Jesus asked us to remember him in the simple act of sharing in bread and wine. As such, Holy Communion looks back with gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made in taking the blame for all the bad things we think and do that would otherwise make us ineligible for life with God.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, broke it,

(pick up the bread, hold it aloft and break it in two. Hold out the two pieces.)

and said, 'This is my body broken for you'.

Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and said,

(Pick up the wine goblet and hold it aloft)

'This cup of wine is my blood which is poured out for you to take away your sins. Drink this,' said Jesus, 'all of you.'

It was also at this supper that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Holy Communion, therefore, not only looks back, but it commissions us to wash each other's feet, i.e. to serve one another, today. The act of Communion binds us together and commissions us share in Christ's mission of service and sacrificial love.

Finally, Holy Communion is also a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet Christians look forward to when God restores us fully to himself and makes all things new in his new kingdom. Christians are therefore a people of hope.

As such, Holy Communion celebrates three things. It celebrates the past, the present and the future.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Bible Reading

- 1 Peter 2:4-10

The Message: KNOW YOUR CALLING

Something happens as you draw closer to Jesus in your life. Things change. But before Peter tells us about this change, he says some wonderfully encouraging words to those who belong to Jesus' hard-pressed church. He says that although you may have been rejected by society, never forget that you are both chosen and precious to Jesus.

So, may I ask: Do you truly know yourself to be chosen and precious? Do you know your true status with Jesus? Knowing that you are chosen and precious is vital in times of persecution. It's what holds you together.

Let's return to the theme of what happens when you draw closer to Jesus (through prayer, meditation and reading the Bible). As you draw close... you get built up. Specifically, you get

built into a person worthy for Jesus to inhabit. And you get built up on Jesus, the foundation that God the Father has prepared for us (v.6)

You are therefore God's building project. Just as a living organism is made up of living cells; a living church is made up of living people. Peter tells us that we are living stones in God's building. The picture Peter paints is of us coming to Jesus, and of Jesus taking us and building us into his spiritual house (v.5). Note: Jesus is doing the building. The stones don't decide where they should go, or which stones will surround them. It is the builder who decides that.

Just as we are chosen and precious by God, Peter tells us the Jesus was chosen and precious to his Heavenly Father... and that the Father laid Jesus into place to be the cornerstone of his church (v.6). The corner stone is the largest stone in the building proper. As its name suggests, it sits at the base of the building at a corner, and by doing so, gives 1) foundational strength to the building, and 2) gives the right-angle that determines the shape and position of the building. As such, Jesus gives the church its strength and definition. Peter goes on to say that even though Jesus is rejected by many... it is precious to those who believe. And, indeed, he is.

Peter then switches analogies from Jesus being the cornerstone, to being the capstone. The capstone is the wedge-shaped stone at the top of a stone archway that keyed the arch together. Without the capstone, a archway falls apart. And without Jesus, his church will fall apart. I can't help but feel that this says rather a lot that is relevant to some liberal churches that have tried to minimise the importance and significance of Jesus. If they do that, it will cause the church to collapse. The death of liberal churches around the world is stark testimony to the truth of this.

But Peter hasn't finished with using building stones a metaphor for Jesus. He then describes Jesus as a stone that people will stumble over. In other words, a lot of people will not realise the significance of Jesus, and will disobey him. Tragically, it will not go well for those who do – eternally. Jesus will cause many to stumble... and fall (v.8).

Please don't be one of them.

The metaphor that Peter uses is fluid, for it changes from Jesus' followers being stones in Jesus' temple... to them (including you and me) being priests who serve in Jesus' temple (v.5).

If you read the Old Testament, you will know that not just anyone could be a priest of God. You needed to be born into the right tribe, the tribe of Levi. The same is true for us. To be a priest of God, you need to be born again spiritually into God's family.

The Bible teaches plainly that everyone who is a Christian is a priest of God – everyone, including you.

Being a priest means that you have two jobs.

1) Represent people to God

First: a priest represents people to God. Your job, is to be a priest who represents people to God. One of the things priests represent is the people's response to God – and that is worship. The Apostle Paul writes that we are "*for the praise of his glory*" (Eph 1:12). In other words, we, as royal priests, are to worship God. Or as Peter puts it, we are, "*a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*" (v.9).

But unlike the priest of old, the temple in which we priests now worship is our own bodies. The apostle Paul calls our bodies a "*temple of the Holy Spirit*", it's a place where God dwells (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16). We are to worship God by what we do with our bodies... and that means avoiding sexual immorality.

In Isaiah 29, God complains bitterly about false worship, worship that is routine, legalistic and devoid of love. God says:

“These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men” (Is 29:13).

Such routine, half-hearted worship does not please God. Nor does it transform us with an experience of God's presence. It is a dead worship which, according to Isaiah 1:10-17, allows people to continue unchallenged in their bad behaviour.

We priests need to ensure that we do our priestly function of worship with honesty and integrity.

Spiritual sacrifices are what we do in obedience to God's will. The Apostle Paul writes: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1).*

2) Represent God to people

The second thing a priest does is to represent God to the people. Note: this is your job. It is not the pastor or minister's job.

If our job is to represent God to the people, then it logically follows that we must identify with God's heart completely so we represent him faithfully.¹ If we are to represent the heart of the Father to our community, we need to invest in reading the Bible so that we are soaked in God's word and it comes alive for us. We also need to invest in prayer so that God may speak his word to us.

No one is ever going to have anything but a mild, polite interest in your personal religious beliefs. Why? Because you are not God, and you are unable to rescue people from the consequences of sin and death. Our only authority and mandate comes from representing God, and God's ideas to people.

If we are to represent God to the people, it logically follows that our faith can never be a private thing that is invisible to those who surround us. No. We are to represent God to the people God brings across our path. We are God's agents tasked with the responsibility of reaching them with the message of Jesus.

Our mandate to represent people to God means that we are to engaged with the people and not stand apart from them. This means understanding the people in our community, relating to them, befriending them, understanding their issues, walking with them and praying for them. The institutional church, sadly, has not always done this. The Christian writer and software developer, Leonard Hjalmarson, says: *We have built congregations rather than communities, buildings rather than temples of living stones, and audiences rather than families of faith.*²

Be God's priest

So, know your calling to be priests. God has always called his people to represent him as his priests. Even in the Old Testament, written well before Jesus came, God said to his people:

1 Christ represents the Father; We represent Christ; therefore, we represent the Father (Jn 5:19-23; 6:45-46; 7:16; 14:7-9; 17:20-22).

2 Leonard Hjalmarson, Kingdom Leadership in the Postmodern Era, (christianity.ca, see: www.christianity.ca/church.leadership.2005/05.000.html)

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:5)

Michael Griffiths wrote a book called *Cinderella with Amnesia* in which he likens the church to a beautiful princess who has forgotten that she is called to be a princess, and so contents herself by going about in rags, when she was intended to be dressed beautifully in royal garments.³ How much are you like that? What are you dressed in?

Peter says that once we were nobodies, *"but now you are the people of God"* (v.10).

Wow! We nobodies have been transformed into a royal priesthood.

Will you pick up your priestly function?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. (Eph 5:15-18)

This service was provided to HopeNet SA by Dr Nick Hawkes

³ Michael Griffiths, *Cinderella With Amnesia*, (Leicester, UK: Inter Varsity Press, 1977)

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

Build your prayer muscle

Mark 9:17-29

Say something like this:

Have you ever failed spectacularly? Have you ever not been able to do something you thought you might be able to do?

Teacher's note: If possible, show pictures (available through an internet search) of spectacular failures. Alternatively, tell a brief story of when you failed spectacularly in an embarrassing way.

If any of you have seen the *Lord of the Rings*, you will know that Frodo could not carry the ring on his own without being affected by its evil power. Frodo could only carry the ring to a place where it could be destroyed with the help of his friends.

Let me tell you about a time when the disciples of Jesus failed. Jesus had given his disciples permission to drive out evil spirits that were in control of people (Mark 6:7). One day, a father brought his son to the disciples and asked them to pray for him to be healed of an evil spirit that made him unable to speak and which threw him to the ground, foaming at the mouth. It must have been very scary for the boy, his father and for anyone else who was watching.

Sometimes, something like this happens to people who suffer from epileptic fits. Epileptic fits are simply caused by a medical condition and we should not be scared of them. However, on this occasion, the sickness was caused by an evil spirit who was trying to kill the boy.

What happened next was very embarrassing. The disciples could not get rid of the evil spirit in the boy. The evil spirit did not go from the boy when they told it to go. The reason for this was that the disciples did not have the faith to believe they could get rid of the evil spirit. The lack of faith in the disciples made Jesus quite cross.

Jesus had compassion for the father and took control of the situation himself.

However, the poor father now no longer had the faith to believe his son would definitely be healed by Jesus. He said, "If you can help, please help".

Jesus said, "Why do you say 'if'? Everything is possible if you believe?"

The father, who had enough faith to bring his sick son to Jesus to be healed knew he had a little bit of faith, but not enough faith to really believe his son would be healed. He therefore said, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief".

If we are honest, we often have to say the same thing. We have some faith that God will answer our prayers for someone to be healed but we don't often have enough faith to really believe it. That's why it is okay for us too to ask God to help us with our faith.

Jesus then told the evil spirit to leave the boy and healed him completely.

The disciples were ashamed and disappointed they couldn't pray for the boy to be healed and so, some time later, they asked Jesus why they couldn't do it.

Jesus said that when faced with a difficult situation like this, they needed to spend some time in prayer. By saying this, Jesus taught that constant prayer would enable a little bit of faith to do what a lot of faith can do. In other words, prayer adds muscle to your faith – and enables you to pray for great things.

Will you be faithful in your daily prayers so you add muscle to your faith and do great things for God?