

Message From the Master, Broadcast Date: **September 2, 2007**

Sermon Series: I Believe in the Holy Christian Church

This Sermon: The Holy Christian Church (1 Pe 2:9-10)

Speaker: Forrest Bivens

In the name of Jesus Christ, dear Friends:

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the filaramick pigalumer nashomolonaric.” Did you catch all that? Probably not. Clear words were followed by clearly garbled words. Among the most familiar words among Christians worldwide are the words, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian church, the communion of saints.” These opening words of the third article of the Apostles Creed are a confession of faith first of all in the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Triune God. They are also a clear confession that we believe in the Holy Christian Church. But what exactly is the Holy Christian Church and what are we confessing about it? I suspect that if we asked 1,000 Christians precisely what they were confessing with those words, we’d find hundreds of answers that are either wrong or inadequate. The words “holy” and “Christian” and “Church” are common enough, but the concept behind these three words used together is not understood by many people. So we might as well be saying, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the filaramick pigalumer nashomolonaric” **if** we do not grasp the meaning and importance of what we are saying in the creed. The point is that the words deserve to be understood and we need to understand them.

This morning we begin a new Message from the Master sermon series with the overall theme, “I believe in the Holy Christian Church.” For the next several weeks we will consider different ways that the Bible speaks about this church to identify and describe it. We’ll also be talking about privileges, blessings, and responsibilities that members of this church have. And hopefully we will be sharing information to give you a more clear picture of who you are as a child of God and how you can help others better understand what the Christian church is and who belongs to it and how that came about. **Stated simply, the Holy Christian Church is very special people who have very special privileges and purposes.** That is what we want to focus on this morning.

Let’s start by reading a message the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10. “You are a chosen people, 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. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Even though Peter does not use the word “church” in these verses, he is giving a wonderful definition and description of the Holy Christian Church.

The Holy Christian Church is the sum total of all believers in Christ everywhere, on earth and in heaven. It is not all people who claim to be believers or who refer to themselves as Christians, but the Holy Christian Church is the total of all genuine believers in Jesus Christ in whom God has created and maintains saving faith and who are known by God to be true believers. Wherever the good news or gospel of Jesus Christ and

his saving work is proclaimed and taught, wherever Baptism is applied to people as Jesus said to do it, and wherever the Lord's Supper is distributed and received as Jesus established it – there we are confident that true believers exist, true members of the Holy Christian Church. Why? Because the message of Jesus Christ that is the heart of God's Word and Sacraments is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to create and maintain saving faith in human hearts. Through these divinely established instruments God calls people into the Holy Christian Church and keeps them there, no matter where these people live and no matter the color of their skin, the language they speak or the money they have or don't have. We are obviously not talking about so-called "visible churches" or denominations like Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, or Methodists. But we ARE talking about true believers in Jesus Christ who are Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, or Methodists – and former members of churches who were believers and who died in the Christian faith. We are talking about Christians. Sometimes God keeps them in the Christian faith through the faithful teachings of their churches and sometimes God accomplishes this in spite of errors tolerated in their churches. But whenever and wherever God brings people to saving faith in Jesus Christ and keeps them in that faith, there is the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. So in the Creed we are confessing that we believe that there are fellow believers in Jesus all over the world, in our own churches and synod and country and beyond our church, synod, and country. We are confessing that the Holy Spirit graciously and powerfully is using the gospel of Jesus Christ to create and preserve true believers whenever and wherever he desires. What a happy and comforting conviction this is! We're not alone and never will be. Visible churches may come and go, but the Holy Christian Church, the fellowship of Christ-centered believers, endures forever. And so shall we.

Christians are special people – very special people. Remember Peter's words that describe them. He speaks of "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." He calls us "a chosen people." Just think, before the world was even created, before the first trees, before the sun and moon or mountains and oceans even existed, God chose you to be a Christian. God chose you from eternity to be a member of his Church. So much for the idea that we in some way contribute to our membership in the Holy Christian Church! God did it all.

The Lord has made us into "a royal priesthood." The God who chose you as his own sees you as a king or queen. You might not feel like it, you might not look it to others, but you are part of God's royal family. And we are all priests. What percentage of Christians are priests? 100%! We all are. Using primarily the imagery of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, the New Testament uses this language to teach us about the special status before God and special privileges we possess. When you became a believer you received an intimate relationship with God with the right to go directly to God in your worship and prayers. You need no one other than Jesus to serve as a go-between with God the Father. Christ has given us all the right to come before his Father's throne whenever we want and ask him for whatever we need. And you have been called and equipped for ministry to serve other people and represent God to them. Every Christian is a servant of God and his neighbor in his or her own private life. In a very real and special way you represent God to the people around you and serve them in their real needs.

The apostle Peter then uses another phrase to describe the Holy Christian Church: He calls us "a holy nation." While every member of the Holy Christian Church is in reality a sinner, as all human beings except the Lord Jesus are, every Christian is also holy. Our sins are fully forgiven because of Christ's life and death on our behalf and his payment for all sins that he paid when he died on the cross. Our sins are not counted against us because they were counted against Christ and dealt with fully and successfully. In God's eyes we are holy. We have also been set apart as people dedicated to God our Savior. That is another part of being "holy" since the word means to be "set apart by God and for God" as well as being sinless in God's eyes. And all believers, all Christians share in this holiness. Together we make up a holy "nation." We are a worldwide fellowship without visible boundaries and, in fact, we have fellow members in heaven. All believers, in heaven and on earth, make up this holy nation.

The final phrase Peter uses to describe the Holy Christian Church is “a people belonging to God.” We are nothing less than God’s very own possession, purchased by Jesus Christ with the price of himself, given the Holy Spirit as an assurance that God owns and cherishes us, and given the privilege to represent God in all that we do and say and think every day. These words quickly remind us that we’re worth something. How much do you think you’re worth? I’m not talking about your net worth. I’m talking about your self worth. Do not confuse your valuables with your value as a person. You may be rich or poor but it has nothing to do with your value as a person. What determines value? Two things are commonly used to determine value in life: One is the amount somebody is willing to pay for something and the other depends on who has owned it in the past. Based on these two things, what’s your value? Ask yourself “Who owns me?” and “What was paid for me?” You’ve been bought and paid for by Christ. You belong to him. How much are you worth? Jesus paid for you with his life; he bought you back from sin, death, and the devil. God exchanged His own Son for you! The cross establishes your value. God says, “I love you so much that I gave Jesus’ life for you.” That means that we must be mighty valuable. And that is the truth about the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

It’s no secret that most people in the world think differently about true believers in Christ who strive to live for Christ. It’s no secret that the world thinks we are second-class citizens, little more than religious freaks, fanatics, and frauds. They believe that the church is little more than a social club, where we gather from week to week to compare clothes, hairstyles, and share religious jargon. They feel that the only difference between them and us is that they’re meeting in the clubs, and bars, but we’re meeting on some church property and pretending to be better than others. They certainly don’t see us as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Part of the problem is the behavior of people who say they are Christians, but who are not. They might be Lutherans, or Baptists or Catholics, but they’re not members of the Holy Christian Church and the way they speak and behave gives true believers a bad reputation. Part of the problem may also be that true believers in Christ sometimes stumble and misrepresent the truth of God’s Word because of the influence of their sinful nature. We are a “holy nation” in God’s eyes but remain sinners at the same time and that complicates things, doesn’t it? But most of the problem here is that those who do not understand the gospel do not know or understand Jesus Christ, so they are clueless about the reality and importance of the Holy Christian Church. 1 John 3:1 puts it this way: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”

And that brings us directly to the subject of our privilege and purpose as members of the Holy Christian Church. Why did God make us his chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, and a people belonging to him? Peter says clearly: “That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” We are saved to serve him and those around us. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction. God saved us for his holy work. The ways we may declare God’s praises are many. At the heart of it is when we tell people about Jesus and all that he did for us and them and how important Jesus is to us. We declare his praises as we tell what a joy and privilege it is for us to be members of God’s family, and how we desire them to enjoy the same blessings. And we show these people what Christian lifestyles look like. When we take the high road by not getting back at someone, by not gossiping, by helping out someone who doesn’t deserve our help, we are declaring God’s praises.

We don’t have time to offer many details on how we may declare God’s praises in our daily lives. But we **do** have time to repeat this central truth: our behavior as members of the Holy Christian Church will always reflect our understanding and appreciation that we **are** members of the Holy Christian Church and how we got to be that. So the best advice I can give in the limited time here and how is to invite you to review who

we are in God's eyes: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to him. You are a part of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. With fellow believers worldwide. This is sober truth. Then remind yourself how this came to be. As Peter says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." It is all a gift of divine grace and mercy! The more we ponder that, the more we will be declaring his praises to our friends and neighbors. God made us who we are to show the world who he is.

Prayer: Father in heaven, we believe in the Holy Christian Church. We acknowledge that by your love and mercy in Christ we are members of that church. Lead us to marvel at our status as your chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people that belongs to you. Then lead us to express who we are by declaring your praises in our words and actions in this world, on our way to glory. Use us to share the good news of your blessings with those we know and meet in life. Also hear us as we pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.