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Volume Twenty-Two, Number Four



## For the Life of the World

### PUBLISHER

Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr.  
President

### PUBLISHER ASSISTANT

Carrie O'Donnell

### PRODUCTION MANAGER

Colleen M. Bartzsch

### EDITOR

Andrea L. Schultz

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Trudy E. Behning

### ART DIRECTOR

Steve J. Blakey

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*For the Life of the World* is mailed to all pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States and Canada and to anyone interested in the work of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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## Priesthood of All Believers

# Living Stones

Rev. Larry M. Vogel

**Our Lord is the great High Priest because He offers the one great sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world. His is the atoning sacrifice that every Old Testament sacrifice anticipated. His intercession before the Father is the perfect intercession. And He makes God known before the world in both His person and work. He is the Word made flesh and His saving work—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—is the justification of the world and the very Gospel by which faith is created.**

**1** Peter 2:4-10 is one small piece of Peter’s encouraging epistle to Christians living in a hostile world. In these verses of the second chapter, Peter employs two powerful images for the “elect exiles” who made up the church in Asia (1 Peter 1:1); that is, God’s precious people who had received His mercy (1 Peter 2:10).

The first image is of solid, pure stability, the image of a stone house built on a firm foundation. God’s people, says Peter, are living stones being built on the cornerstone of Christ Jesus into a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5-8). It echoes Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:24-27 about the house built on a rock that will withstand the storm while the house built on sand is destroyed.

The second image is alive and active. God’s elect are a people at work. They are not cold, lifeless rocks but *living* stones, “built... to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices” (v. 5). The elect are alive and not dead for they

do not stumble over Christ. No, the spiritual house is those who believe in Him and are therefore “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” (v. 9).

This second image of the holy Church is repeated three times in Revelation. John rejoices that as Christ sets us free “by his blood”—that is, by His atoning sacrifice—He makes us “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (1:6). He reaffirms this in 5:9-10’s hymn of praise to the Lamb who “ransomed people for

God from every tribe and language and people and nation and...made them a kingdom and priests to our God.” Chapter 20 verse 6 is the third reference in Revelation. In each case the royal priests are active—called to serve faithfully.

In both Peter and John, the image of the royal priesthood is filled with the energy of new life. Yet it is also stable, solidly anchored in Christ. This is because the royal priesthood finds its identity and its calling only in our great High Priest. So Hebrews 3:1-2 says, “Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house.”

The royal priesthood is called into faithful service as holy priests. This is for all the baptized, for all who believe in Christ. This means there were priests before there were Levites, because the call to priestly service is the call to service in faith. So Luther says that God accepts Abel’s sacrifice because it flows from faith. God “looks toward Abel’s offering and shows that the sacrifice of this priest pleases Him, but that Cain does not please Him and is not a true priest” (*Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, AE 1:251). And such faith comes to Abel because the priesthood begins at the very beginning with our first parents: “let the reader ponder the following, above all: Adam and Eve are not only parents, nor do they merely provide for their children and educate them for this present life; but *they also perform the office of priests*” (AE 1:246, emphasis added).

We can see in all of this that one may define priestly service as mediatorial, extending in two directions. On the one hand, the biblical priest mediates *for* humanity *to* God, offering sacrifices and intercessory prayer. On the other hand, the biblical priest mediates *from* God *to*

humanity, teaching God’s Word.

Our Lord is the great High Priest because He offers the one great sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world. His is the atoning sacrifice that every Old Testament sacrifice anticipated. His intercession before the Father is the perfect intercession. And He makes God known before the world in both His person and work. He is the Word made flesh and His saving work—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—is the justification of the world and the very Gospel by which faith is created.

All Israel is called to priestly service in Exodus 19:4-6 just as all the Church is called to it in 1 Peter 2:4-10. The whole people of God—all believers—in every age and from every people have the holy calling to faithfully serve as Christ’s royal priesthood. It is a calling to



Photo courtesy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Erik M. Lunsford.

serve in the places where we live, in the home, at work, in our social settings, and among other believers in the Church.

How do we serve faithfully? It is still a threefold service of sacrifice, prayer, and proclamation. So we offer ourselves in love to others as “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1). We pray in all times and places interceding for all manner of people (Col. 4:2; 1 Thess.

5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1) and in the sacrifice of thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6 and Heb. 13:15). And we teach; not that this is the office of public teaching and preaching, for the call to the royal priesthood is not the call to the Office of Public Ministry, but that we each are called to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Parents, especially the head of the household, teach the children, making known these “excellencies.” Fellow believers encourage one another in the truths of God’s Word in “the mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers [and sisters]” (Smalcald Article III.IV). Christians share their faith with unbelievers, explaining the hope we have within us (1 Peter 3:15).

As the royal priesthood faithfully serves in these ways, the gifts of the Spirit are employed, the love of Christ is at work, and God is glorified. 🏰

*Church of God, elect and glorious,  
Holy nation, chosen race;  
Called as God’s own special people,  
Royal priests and heirs of grace:  
Know the purpose of your calling,  
Show to all His mighty deeds;  
Tell of love that knows no limits,  
Grace that meets all human needs.  
(LSB 646:1)*

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(Note: the reader is urged to consult the CTCR’s recently published report, *The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission*, and its companion Bible study. Both are available at [www.lcms.org/ctcr](http://www.lcms.org/ctcr).)

*The Rev. Larry M. Vogel  
([Larry.Vogel@lcms.org](mailto:Larry.Vogel@lcms.org))  
serves as Associate Executive  
Director of the Commission  
on Theology and Church  
Relations, The Lutheran  
Church—Missouri Synod.*

