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**Title:** We Believe In the Ministry to All People

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**Scripture:** [Ephesians 4:8-13](#)

**Text:** [1 Peter 2:4-10](#)

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Tomorrow, I will have an opportunity to answer the question again. It is an experience that I've shared with you before, one which my colleagues in the ministry have a few creative ways to wiggle out of. It will happen when I and 25 others in the church will board a plane, beginning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Sitting next to me will be

my wife Ann. I don't know who will be sitting on the other side. But if a stranger, I know that I will once again answer the question, "What do you do?"

It is a natural question on an airplane. People want to know who the stranger is that you are sitting next to. When looking at a seatmate who you are going to spend the next 3 or 4 hours with... or in our case nearly 10 hours... we inherently want to know your traveling companion is. We size them up and look them over. And then ask, "What do you do?" which is asking "Who are you?"

Here is the problem. Ministers when asked the question experience one of two things. We get a reaction like you've just said, "I'm an ax murderer looking for my next victim", you get a polite response of, "That's nice" and then, a cold shoulder. Or, we buy ourselves a conversation for the duration of the flight, when your seatmate will either profess faith or confess sins and seek absolution or want to be counseled. I've heard some amazing things on airplanes. So, my colleagues tend to be resistant to simply saying, "I'm a minister." There are a lot of creative answers like, "I write for a living." Or, "I'm a motivational speaker." Or even more creatively, "I'm a marketing rep for a carpenter." Perhaps the best one is, "I sell life insurance." Most will do just about anything but say, "I am a minister."

Now don't judge. Try it sometime, the next time you are sitting next to a stranger, on an airplane or at a concert or in a waiting room. When asked, "What do you do?" answer, "I am a minister." You should, you know,

because you are. You could even quote scripture and say, "I'm chosen, royal priest, a holy nation of people, possessed by God and called into his amazing light." You might have the experience that I and many of my colleges have. Or you might discover that the person sitting next to you is, like you, a minister.

We are in the fourth and final week of a series on "We Believe." Our final belief statement found on our website gives testimony to the challenge I just gave you. It reads this way. "We believe in the ministry of all believers. While there are ministers on the staff, each member and participant of the church is gifted in many ways; each is a minister of the church. We seek to use our gifts together, as the body of Christ."

"We believe in the ministry of all believers." If that sounds a little familiar, it should. Halloween is on Thursday. On October 31, two-hundred and three years ago, Dr. Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, and professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg posted his 95 theses on the door of his church. He called for a public debate on the way you did church. Between 1517 and 1521, that debate took place, although it might be better described as that "fuss" took place.

Luther was at the center of conflict which led to him eventually being excommunicated from the Roman Catholic church. It was the beginning of the Reformation. One of the cardinal principles was the idea that you are a minister, a priest actually, hence the phrase you likely know, "the priesthood of all believers."

Luther didn't coin that phrase, even though he is always given credit for it. He found it in scripture. Through-out the New Testament, we see the idea of the ministry of all people form. It all starts with Jesus. One of the first things he does is preach a sermon about it, the Sermon on the Mount. Just about everybody knows that he begins with a series of beatitudes, blessings on people there. Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are meek, so forth and so on. With the eight beatitudes, he covers the entire crowd. I'm sure that everyone in that crowd of 5,000 had at least one occasion of nodding and saying, "That's me. He's talking about me. I'm hungry. I'm merciful. I'm persecuted." Jesus knows his preaching craft well. His mountain congregation knows that he is preaching to them. Now that Jesus has them, what does he do next? He tells them who they are and what they are to do.

Jesus says, "You ARE the salt of the earth!" God has made and called and empowered you to preserve goodness and truth, to add flavor and zest to

life, and to find your value and worth in who you are as a child of God. Don't forget or forsake that high calling!

If they didn't get what he was saying, he adds, "You ARE the light of the world, called to shine the light of Christ everywhere you go. So, don't hide your light under a bushel basket, but let your light shine so that others will see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." This is at the outset, to the people who had gathered, just after he had called his first rough and fundamentally flawed disciples. You are called to be Christ's salt and light in the world.

Then, Jesus spends the rest of his three-year ministry giving examples of who they were called to be, reinforcing the message that those who follow Jesus are his ministers. Because this is so important for them to claim, he spends his last days on earth, after his resurrection saying, "Now you are it." Not too far from the place that he delivers his Sermon on the Mount (by tradition), Jesus prepares breakfast for the fishing disciples. He doesn't bring up salt or light, he simply says, "Feed my sheep." But all they had to do was look up the hill and be reminded of his challenge. In the very room where he had his Last Supper, he appears on Easter evening. They were there hiding behind a locked door.

He blows on them the breath of the Holy Spirit and says, "As my Father has sent me, even so, send I you." (John 20:21). Do you hear what he is doing? Commissioning them. Again, because they have a tough time, as tough as perhaps you and me getting our heads around this, he tells them to wait and they do so, in that Upper Room. Wait Jesus says because "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Everywhere, to the end of the world. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? Jesus' followers are a community under commission, sent and chosen, witnesses to his marvelous light.

It's not surprising then that Paul picked up this image and ran with it. In three different places, he described the number of gifts that are needed to fulfill this commission. Why does he do this? Because what he believes is clear. "Jesus' purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12)

Likely it was fifty years or more after Jesus stood on that mountainside and said, "You are salt and light," and at least thirty years after Paul said, "Jesus purpose was to equip you to serve," that, somebody named Peter wrote to a group of Jewish Christian outside of Jerusalem, beyond Samaria, probably in

Turkey and Asian, Minor. They were people like you and me, trying to figure out what it meant to be a Christian. He tells them.

Here's who you are. "You ARE a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.... You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Priesthood. A royal priesthood equipped for the work of serving and building up the Body of Christ. The priesthood of all believers was Luther's phrase but with just a little digging through the history of the first church, it doesn't take very long to discover that this isn't a unique idea. Jesus said it. Paul said it. Peter said it. And in the reformation, Luther said it.

It's our commissioning. Our DNA. It is who we are supposed to be. It was so important to Luther that he said it this way. "For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course, it is not seemly that just anybody shall exercise such office." All baptized believers are called to be priests, Luther said, but not all are called to be pastors."<sup>1</sup>

That is to say that not all of you are to be like me. The Lord knows that is a good thing, a very good thing. One Rev. Randy Spleth is enough. But this was the very theme that our founding fathers, Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone picked up on.

Campbell believed there should be three offices of ministers. Bishops, deacons and evangelist, in that order. Ordained clergy were, in Campbells' Christian System, this third class of three. Stone wasn't much better. In the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* of 1804 Stone declared, "We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten....."<sup>2</sup>

Why? It wasn't the belief that all Christians have a direct access to God, that you can be your own minister or priest. This is something that Jesus made true for all of us. Rather, the ministry of all people, the priesthood of all believers means this. God has so tempered the church that we are all priests to each other. We stand before God and intercede for one another, we proclaim God's Word to one another, and we celebrate his presence among us in worship, praise, and fellowship. Moreover, our priestly ministry does not terminate upon ourselves. It propels us into the world in service and witness.

Our Presbyterian background and the thinking of another reformer, John Calvin clearly shows up in our church. He wrote "All believers ... should seek

to bring others into the church and should strive to lead the wanderers back to the road, should stretch forth a hand to the fallen and should win over the outsiders.”

In other words, the priesthood of believers is not a prerogative on which we can rest; it is a commission that sends us forth into the world to exercise a priestly ministry not for ourselves, but for others. To be in the priesthood of all believers is not only a spiritual privilege but a moral obligation and a personal vocation

The priesthood of all believers is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of the life of God’s people in the body of Christ and of the coherence of our witness in the world, the world for which Christ died.<sup>3</sup> Or as Rick Warren has written, “.. you are saved for service. In God’s kingdom, you have a place, a purpose, a role, and a function to fulfill. This gives your life great significance and value. God has a *ministry* for you in his church and a *mission* for you in the world. You have a job. How are you doing with this? You are commissioned.

This is what our founding fathers embraced and what we believe. We aren't the only ones to believe it. Just about every protestant church believes it and the Roman Catholic Church affirmed what did Luther during Vatican II. The priesthood exists. Ministers are all around us. Some are pastors, all are priests. All of this came out on Martin Luther nailing this thought on the Wittenberg door, on All’s Hallow Eve, Halloween.

While we are gone, you’ll celebrate Halloween. Here’s a thought. When your doorbell rings and Spiderman or Buzz Light year or a traditional witch ask for candy, don’t ask them who they are. Most of the time, it is self-apparent. Turn the challenge on them. Ask the, “Who am I?” See if they can guess. Then, tell them, “I’m chosen, royal priest, a holy nation of people, possessed by God and called into his amazing light.” They may look at you like you are an alien. You may have to give them more candy. But, it will be who God, in Christ Jesus, created you to be. It is why we believe in the ministry of all people

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<sup>1</sup> George, Tim. The Priesthood of All Believers. 10-31-16. [firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers](http://firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers)

<sup>2</sup> Spangeberg, Grant. Shaping our Identity. <https://shapingidentity.wordpress.com/author/churchesofchristsa/>

<sup>3</sup> George.