

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** 1 Peter 2:4-10  
**SERMON TITLE:** Everyone a Priest

On Sunday, March 29, 1953, something happened to me that changed my life. I was ordained into the priesthood at tender age of seven months old. Now it's true, some 37 years later I was ordained an elder in The United Methodist Church. This authorized me to provide leadership within the larger priesthood of the people of God.

But what happened to me in 1953 was a little bit different. You see, back then I was ordained a priest through baptism. In that sacred and holy moment when Brother Everett Y. Seale marked me with the waters of baptism, I was united with Christ and made a part of the people of God. I was set apart for the service of God and others. The ministry of Jesus Christ—our great High Priest—became my ministry. So in baptism I was ordained a priest within a community of priests—I became part of a holy and royal priesthood. Martin Luther called it *the priesthood of all believers*.

And I was given a life-long mission—to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Now I didn't realize it at the time, but I later learned that the spiritual sacrifice I was called to offer was myself. You see, in the Old Testament, the priest offered the sacrifice like a lamb, for example. But in the New Testament, among those who follow Jesus, the priest is the sacrifice—which means that as a priest who follows Jesus, my daily offering to God is my life—not just some of it, but all of it.

Now let me ask all of you: How many of you have been baptized? Then everyone single one of you is a priest within this royal and holy priesthood called the church. We are priests together! We've been united with Christ in baptism. We are part of the people of God. We're set apart to serve God and others. The ministry of Jesus Christ is our ministry. We are to offer ourselves as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Do we realize what this means for our lives? For one thing, it means that each of us has a fulltime job. This is not part-time work. We're called to represent the presence of Christ wherever we are, in whatever we're doing, at home, at work, at school, when we're recreating or socializing or entertaining. We are fulltime ministers who just happen to be disguised as students or teachers or managers or engineers or business owners or truck drivers or salesmen or retirees. It's not just about "church" work. In every moment of every day in whatever we're doing we are priests who offer our lives to God as spiritual sacrifices.

Let me give you an illustration. Dr. Gary Morsch once had the opportunity to serve in the emergency room of a small, rural hospital that had lost two of its three doctors. It was a daunting task, especially in a facility that didn't have high-tech equipment or specialized staff.

Dr. Morsch would pray every day that God would help him see people as God saw them so that he could treat them with acceptance and kindness and love. He disciplined himself to really listen to people—not only to his patients, but to the staff as well.

He began to hold late night conversations with people and they would open their hearts to him and share their heartaches and their dreams. They laughed together and they cried together. He ministered to people. He served God and others.

During his last week in this emergency room, the staff arranged a surprise for him. They presented him with a little homemade plaque. On the plaque they had glued a brass key, and the key was inserted into a heart engraved in wood. Below the key and heart was a small brass plate inscribed with these words: ***To Dr. Gary Morsch, You hold the key to our hearts. From the employees of St. Joseph's Hospital.***

Dr. Morsch said: *When they gave it to me, I didn't do a very good job of holding back tears. My pastor had been right. Because I was a doctor, I had been given opportunities to*

*minister to many staff members and patients that neither my pastor nor any other pastor would ever be likely to reach.*

Then he added: *Of course, doctors are by no means the only ones who have such opportunities. Plumbers can minister to their coworkers, customers, and suppliers. Receptionists, auto mechanics, day care workers, college professors, sales clerks, custodians, social workers—all have opportunities for ministry that no professional pastor will ever have, precisely because they work “in the world.” People who would never seek out a church will eagerly respond to simple, sincere expressions of kindness, acceptance, and love from someone who cares.* (Morsch, Gary and Hall, Eddy. *When There’s No Burning Bush.*)

Being a priest is a fulltime job and individually, we’re responsible before God for being who we are—priests, even when in disguise.

But there’s still more to being a priest than that. As priests we also have a corporate responsibility. We are, after all, priests within a community of priests. We have an obligation to the whole people of God to participate in our church’s corporate witness.

The banners before us this morning represent the various ministries of our church that comprise our corporate witness. The effectiveness of every single ministry area is dependent on priests who are willing to serve God and others through these ministries.

But here’s the problem: 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work. We are underemployed. If businesses tried to operate with 80% of their employees underemployed, they wouldn’t stay viable businesses for long, would they? Which reminds me—someone once said that the church is like a soccer match in which thousands of people desperately in need of exercise sit up in the stands and watch twenty-two people desperately in need of rest down on the field. But the church cannot operate at maximum effectiveness until each and every one of us is

on the field playing his or her part—serving as a priest among the people of God. Pastor Wayne Cordiero even notes that, *a 99% involvement is still 1% shy.*

And we're not talking about spectacular forms of priestly service. We're talking about things as mundane as mowing the church yard or serving on a committee. Every act of service matters when it's done in response to God. Mother Teresa put it this way: *What we are doing is but a drop in the ocean. This may be only a drop, but the ocean would be less if it weren't there. What we do is something small, but we do it with big hearts. At death, we will not be judged by the amount of work we did, but the amount of love we put into it. We do not strive for spectacular actions. What counts is the gift of yourself, [and] the degree of love you put into each of your deeds.* (quoted in Cordiero, Wayne. *Doing Church as a Team*, p. 98.)

Well, today, we have an opportunity to make a spiritual offering of ourselves in service to God and others through the ministries of our church.

- Areas of Service brochure in bulletin
- Time to fill it out—bring to altar—someone will contact you about your service
- If you've filled one of these out recently—take the time to be in prayer for others who are considering how they might serve
- If you're not sure what all of this means—or if you're uncertain as to how God is calling you to serve—stop in at one of the tents set up outside the sanctuary and visit with one of our ministry guides—they can help you
- Allow time for congregation to fill out Areas of Service brochure
- End with prayer.