

PRIESTS OF FORGIVENESS



Every one of us has met people along the way who had a strange impact on us for good. Outwardly there's nothing special about this person. They're quite ordinary. But somehow, when you're around this man, this woman, you feel cleaner. They give you hope.

Often we're too dumb to realize the blessing that this person has been until years later. There was this teacher when I was six years old in second grade: Miss Weidman. Looking back after all these years, there was something about that woman. She wasn't much to look at. She had her bad days, like when she lost her voice and could hardly speak. But she left a mark on our lives, young as we were, that came from heaven.

I can still remember the sound of her voice. How she taught us little kids the 1st Psalm.

***Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord.....***

She burned that Psalm into our memories, along with spelling and arithmetic.

When Jesus tells us that the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world...and then the end will come, he's not talking about big-time evangelists, or gospel satellites, or preachers running around in their little clerical collars. He's talking about folks like Miss Weidman. Men and women with no official status, suddenly popping up all over the place, flooding the earth with the glory of God... By the way they live... By the words that flow from their mouths.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.

Revelation 1

"...Made us priests.," not the kind of priests you find in all religions. Not these people who make their living claiming a certain authority over the rest of us. "I'm the priest. I'm up here. And you're a layman... you're down there. And don't forget it!"

Not that kind of priest.

This kind of priest.....Peter is writing to a gathering of ordinary people like you and me. This is what he tells them... and us:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2

"A Royal Priesthood." Miss Weidman was part of that royal priesthood. Her priesthood was outside the structure. But she carried inside her the Spirit of the True High Priest: Jesus, who took his own blood into the Holy of Holies and atoned for us all.

Nobody officially ordained Miss Weidman. Nobody dolled her up in fancy robes. But she prayed for us. She brought God to us. She taught us the meaning of the First Psalm, burned it into our memories.. She was a sign of the coming kingdom.

And as this old earth speeds toward its Day of Accounting, the hour is coming when thousands of Miss Weidmans are going to spread over this earth. And who should be numbered among these God-ordained priests, but people like you and me.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20

He breathed on them.

Commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit.

And sent them out with the gospel of forgiveness.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Does this mean that they could go out and start separating the sheep from the goats?

"You're forgiven, heaven has come to you!"

"You're not forgiven, you're on your way to hell!"

No. Peter, James and John and Mary Magdalene, and all the others, were as ordinary as you and I. But they were given by Jesus the power of his cross. Supernatural forgiveness, that washes us clean, gives us a new start, sets us free.

If we open our hearts and receive this forgiveness---and live it---(When you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone), then heaven has begun for us. All we have to do is stay on the road.

On the other hand, if we close our hearts to this forgiveness, or if we say, "Thank you, Lord!" but refuse to forgive our brother---then **our** sins are retained.

Not only retained, but put us in worse shape than if we'd never heard the gospel---because we've seen the light and rejected it.

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The Risen Lord is saying exactly those words to us.

---Peace be with you.

---As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.

---Receive the Holy Spirit.

---If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

"I'm putting into you the gospel of forgiveness. Live this gospel, and as you do, the lives you touch will be changed, one way or the other."

Miss Weidman was a priest, with one simple gift, one simple power: the gospel of forgiveness, which she poured into a bunch of little kids.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a priest, with one simple gift, one simple power: the gospel of forgiveness which you are to pour into the lives you touch.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine. What is this food? Forgiveness!

***"My body, given for you.
My blood, shed for your sins."***

Forgiveness! God's forgiveness!

So now you have received it afresh. It's in you. What does that make you?

You are broken bread and poured-out wine for the lives you touch...

A priest of forgiveness.



When we go forth into the world as priests of forgiveness, we are going to encounter four kinds of people in our daily walk:

Busy climbers. Whose main object in life is to get ahead. They're in a hurry. They have things to do. They don't have time to listen. But every once in a while they crash into a stone wall. It wakes them up, and they begin to ask, "What's it all about? Where am I going?" That's when the Lord sends one of us along with a word of hope.

Bitter skeptics. Whose hearts have been hardened by all the bad breaks. "Why should I believe in God, after all I've been through?" But sometimes the light comes on, and they discover that they're sitting in a pool of self-pity. They're ashamed. Baffled. And along comes one of us with a word of hope.

Forgotten outcasts. Living on the margins of life, trying to survive as best they can. You find them in the strangest places. Often closer to home than one would think. But once they're invited to the Banquet Hall, they rise up with joy and come. "Go out into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind."

Thirsty seekers. People who are looking for something more than this world offers. Money doesn't do it for them. Fame is useless. Pleasure doesn't satisfy. Whether they know it or not, they're looking for God. And the instant they get the slightest sip of the Living Water, their eyes light up.

Busy climbers....bitter skeptics....forgotten outcasts....thirsty seekers. And Jesus laid down his life for every one of them. Shed his blood. Brought down heaven's forgiveness which alone is able to heal their souls and raise them to life.

***"As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
Receive the Holy Spirit."***

"...And now pour out my forgiveness into the lives you touch.

By the way you treat them.

By the way you pray for them.

By the words you speak to them.

Just by being there for them."

Those people out there --- the climbers, the skeptics, the outcasts and the seekers, are all walking around with a burden that weighs them down. Deep in their souls they know that something isn't right. Something's missing.

So when the Lord sends us out as priests of forgiveness, we don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to have the gift of gab. We just need to be there in his name, and trust that he will guide us.

In his name and by his power, we're going to set the captives free, bring them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

Because the Lord God has given us through his Son,

***The tongue of those who are taught.
That we might know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.
Morning by morning, he wakens, He wakens our ear,
to hear as those who are taught.***

Isaiah 50

***"Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
Receive the Holy Spirit.***



Now take my forgiveness out there as a two-edged freedom sword and bring God's life to all who will receive it.

And Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Holy Lord, Send us, send us to be priests of your forgiveness. Empower us to pour the holy act of forgiveness out willingly, freely, lovingly. We know that nothing can overcome this power of forgiveness, because it is infused with you dear Lord...you are in it...it's who you are and where we will find you. It is this weapon that breaks the power of darkness bringing freedom and life to the forgiven and the forgivers.

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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN