

Dearly Beloved,

Do you remember the three estates? They are family, church, and government. God has established all three, and all three answer to Him. This month we'll consider the second estate: the church.

I have a wild, unscientific theory (hey, if the CDC, the FDA, and the pharmaceutical companies can throw out wild theories, why can't I?) that the maximum number of active members in a congregation is 120. Now we can quibble about the exact amount, but sociologically it seems about right. And it's a good biblical number.  $12 \times 10 = 120$ ...  $40 \times 3 = 120$ ...  $7 \times 17.14 = 120$  (okay, now I'm just pulling your leg).

Many people like being a part of a big congregation because they don't like to be noticed and they don't want to do anything. But that attitude goes against what it means to be a Christian. The only thing you're passive in is your salvation. Christ won that for you at His death; we don't earn our salvation one bit. But now, since Christ has made us spiritually alive, it's time to go to work. You don't do good works to earn your salvation, but you do them because you are saved.

**“You are 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” (1 Pt 2:9).**

This passage was huge for Luther. This is where the term “the priesthood of all believers” comes from. The moment you were baptized, you became a priest. All Christians are priests; the only difference among them is the office they carry. Not everyone holds the pastoral office, and we must maintain that. However, you have a huge responsibility as a Christian.

Priests sacrifice. In the Old Testament, that was their primary function. They sacrificed a lot of animals and offered up grain offerings. In the New Testament, priests do the same. Jesus is our High Priest, who made the atoning sacrifice to end all other atoning sacrifices. That's why we don't sacrifice goats, bulls, rams, etc. anymore. BUT as the priesthood of believers, we still do offer sacrifices to God, namely prayer, praise, and thanksgiving (which includes our tithes and time).

You're a member of this church, and that's a big deal. Luther says, “It is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error” (From *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*). That's the duty of every Christian. How are you doing with that? It's impossible to accomplish that if you're not in church and you don't read God's Word every day.

If you don't take being a Christian seriously, then no one else in this congregation will. Christ has promised that the gates of hell will never overcome His church, but He didn't promise that our specific congregation would never fall. After Christ told a parable to the effect that we should always pray (prayer is a sacrifice to God that priests give) and never give up, He says, **“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8).**

God is always faithful. Let's be faithful to Him. We don't live and die by the sword, but we live and die by God's Word. By God's grace, our church is still standing. By God's grace, it'll continue standing far into the future. Stay and fight in this fortress of the Church that God has established. If you don't, nobody else will. Now it is possible to take this into a sinful direction, and that direction is to think that you're essential to the church and without you everything will fail. That's not true, either. But it is true that God has put you in this congregation for a reason, and it is true that you are a part of the body of Christ. There's nothing more worthwhile than being a Christian, so let's act like it.

Next month we'll explore the third estate of the government. It should be spicy. Let's see if your bland Midwestern tastebuds can handle it.

Your Servant in Christ,

Pastor Reber