

This morning we're going to play a little word "game"! Such a teacher-ie thing to say isn't it – word games are fun I swear!

I am going to give you a word and either on your own or with the person beside you or around you I am going to give you 30 seconds to consider what first comes to mind when you hear the various words I'm going to share.

We're going to work through a sequence of five different words.

The first word is – elephant– just kidding that's not where we are going today!

OK... here we go – for real this time. The first word I want you to consider is the word "saints". I'll give you thirty seconds, what comes to mind?

30-second break to process the word "saints"

I wonder what you came up with!

Did you think about a really good person - someone who's really kind or sweet? Or did you think about someone who's super-spiritual, living as if they have a halo on their head? Or maybe you thought about the process of sainthood, where certain people are designated that title.

Alright... let's try the next word. Share with your neighbour what comes to mind when you hear the term "ministers". Again, take thirty seconds to share your thoughts:

30-second break to process the word "ministers"

Did you think of someone official - like the Ministry of Transportation? Or maybe the idea of a political leader came to mind, like the Prime Minister? Or maybe you thought about the clothing that a religious ministers would wear.

I didn't go to church much as a kid but when I did I went to a presbteryian church whose only staff member was a Minister who wore robes, stoles and collars.

Word number three is the word “priests”. Take thirty seconds to share with your neighbour what immediately comes to mind when you think of how we use that word:

30-second break to process the word “priests”

Maybe some of you associated this word with Roman Catholic’s or perhaps even something like a confessional booth? Maybe you thought about leaders in faith traditions who carry out sacraments or people who perform marriages and burials.

The next word I want you to consider is the word “clergy”. Reflect for 30 seconds:

30-second break to process the word “clergy”

Maybe what comes to mind are paid professional church workers. Maybe it sparks the idea of being educated or trained, or represents those who perform certain tasks - like teaching, baptizing, or officiating?

OK... final word. This time, take thirty seconds to process with your neighbour what comes to mind when you hear the word “laity”.

30-second break to process the word “laity”

This term might be somewhat foreign to you, because for me I had never heard this word before - but, if you’re older than 28 or just a bit smarter than me, then what probably came to mind was the opposite of whatever came to mind around the word “clergy”.

Where “clergy” often represents paid or professional, “laity” signifies untrained, basic, or simple like, this is where the phrase “explain it to me in *layman*’s terms” comes from. The clergy are those who do things, the laity represent the recipients of the work of the clergy - almost like customers in a spiritual sense.

A few months ago as a entire church staff we did a similar exercise to this and this is where I had a profound aha realization that I want to share with you this morning.

If we look to the bible – the biblical interpretation of each of these words is very different than many of the first thoughts that come to our minds.

First, let's consider that term "saints". Among other places, we see this word used in some introductions of New Testament letters - but you need a more traditional translation in order to see it directly used. Consider, for example, Romans 1:7 [NASB]:

To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, Paul is addressing the whole church - the entire community of followers of Jesus - and refers to them as "saints", not because of how good they were, or because they could perform certain miracles, but because of the forgiving work of Jesus, he called them saints.

The term refers to those who've been forgiven and set free by Jesus and, as a result, applies to every single believer – every believer is a saint – not just a select few.

Similarly, consider the Bible's use of the term "minister". Again, you won't see it used in many of our modern-day translations - because the word simply means "servant". But in a more traditional translation, you'll see a popular passage like Jesus' comment that "He came, not to be served, but to serve" - in Mark 10:45 it is written this way:

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Biblically speaking, a “minister” is simply a servant. And “minister” performs service for the common good. And, again, the word applies to all followers of Jesus because we are called to serve others.

Now, when it comes to the word “priests”, it gets a little more complicated. In the Old Testament, priests were mediators - human brokers between God and the rest of His people. People who had special almost mystical feeling power to traverse heaven and earth

But, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, He abolished that need and now Jesus himself plays that role for believers, allowing every believer to connect directly to God. That’s what 1 Peter 2:9 describes:

You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

Again, this term, biblically, actually applies to all believers through the work of Jesus.

Same thing goes for the term “clergy”. It originates in the Greek word “kleros”, (clar-os) which means “lot” or “inheritance” used in a verse like Colossians 1:12:

Jesus has enabled you to share in the inheritance (Kleros) that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

We all have inheritance, we all are clergy of God because of what Jesus has done.

This is very similar to the way the Bible uses the term “laity”. The term originates from the Greek word “laos” which means “called out” or “special”. You can see this term used throughout scripture, in Old Testament passages like Deuteronomy 7:6:

For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.

This term represents the called out and special nature of every single follower of Jesus. Which is interesting, because when we thought of that word laity at the beginning of our time together – that was the word that is often thought of as having the least amount of specificity or “specialness” associated with it. Where the bible calls the laity the special treasure.

When I participated in this exercise a few months ago, what struck me was how the first 4 words – Saint, Minister, Priest, Clergy - represented *some* (and often, only a few) people in the church.

Rarely is someone deemed a saint, in my experience its often used as a sarcastic comment of someone who thinks they are greater than though!

A handful of people are labeled as ministers.

There's often only one priest (if any) in a church.

However many pastoral staff a church employs are who people would consider clergy, and the volunteer core or the members of church are considered the laity.

But, biblically, every single one of these terms refers to *all believers*. Each of these words describes every single follower of Jesus Christ.

Think about it: every single follower of Jesus has been forgiven by God through the work of Christ and, as a result, become one of His *saints*.

Every single follower is to serve in the way of Jesus, functioning as *ministers*.

Every single believer – because of Jesus - can now represent and contribute the life and love of God to one another, playing the function of *priests*, and as a royal priesthood together.

Every single believer has received an inheritance in Christ and therefore, are *clergy*.

And every single follower of Jesus - as a result of His forgiving and saving work - is called out and special, the very thing *laity* describes.

Where, culturally, we may automatically assume that each of these words describes *some* people in the family of God, every one of these terms refers to *every single follower of Jesus Christ*, fully and equally.

So, here's the question I want us to consider today, as we kick off this August series: how is the work of the church supposed to get done? The work of the local church but also the global church.

The first thing to consider is what is the work of the church?

The work of the church can sometimes become blurry because we have become accustomed to measuring church by what it provides.

We expect great worship, great kids ministry, strong youth programs, small groups, community means, a clean building, events to attend, and so on and so forth.

None of these things are bad, in fact they are wonderful. But those things are not our specific mission, they are a tool to serve the mission.

The work of the church is much simpler and much bigger. The work of the church is to make disciples of Jesus who become more like him and share his life of Love.

Jesus said it this way in the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations— Matthew 28:19

If we lose sight of the mission it is very easy to start treating church like a business to consume because we see ourselves as consumers rather than partners in business or in more biblical terms - part of the body.

Church becomes like Costco. When something is wrong we call customer service. When someone butts in front of me in line and annoys me we ask to speak to the manager. When we don't like the experience we leave a review. But the church was never designed to have customers. The church has participants, the church has ministers, priests, clergy and saints in all of us to contribute to the work of the church. Yes often done through the things the church provides but not as a means to just provide but as a means to disciple.

The question isn't "Is the church meeting my needs" The question is "How is God calling me to contribute to His mission"

The point is that the work of the church is to be done by all believers, not just by some. The work of the church is to be done by all saints, all performing ministry, all functioning as priests, all sharing their spiritual inheritance, their clergy with each other as those specially called out, as the laity together. The work of the church was never intended to be done by *some* of the people; it was always intended to be done by *all believers* together.

Now, as you absorb that, you might be wondering the same question I was when I first worked through this exercise: if the work of the church is to be done by all of us, and not just some of us, what the heck are people like me paid for?!?

What I had to remember was the model of church described in the New Testament – which ironically and maybe unironically are the first sentences of my job description! From Ephesians chapter 4:

“It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Do you see where the passage refers to “preparing God’s people for works of service”? Some translations describe that as “equipping the *saints* (all God’s people) for *ministry*”.

And you’ll notice that the word “some” is used here – to describe not specific roles, but specific gifts. Some of those within the church are gifted in a specific way to provide various kinds of leadership (like apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) in order to enable and encourage the entire community to contribute.

Some in the church play the role of *equippers* so that everyone in the church can contribute to its work. In my case, I’m not paid to do the church’s work; my time has been freed up to prepare and support all of us to do the church’s work together!

Theologically, this dynamic is referred to as “**the Priesthood of All Believers**”. It simply means the work of the church being done by *all* the people of the church, supported through the equipping leadership of *some* of the *all* of us.

Since that staff session I have become more aware of the role God has given me as an equipper.

Author and pastor Greg Ogden describes it this way in his book on this subject:

“When Christ was here on earth, He was limited to performing His ministry in one place and in one time. He was one man, walking beside one sea in one little corner of the earth. Does it make sense that the Father would send His Son for this limited ministry? No! He made provision to carry on the work through the Holy Spirit: we are to complete His mission. We are His multiplied hands, His feet, His voice and His compassionate heart.”

Throughout this August series we are going to dig deeper into this biblical understanding of church leadership to discover what it means to be *Gifted* together!

For today though, I just want to make sure that these words we’ve considered can sink deep into your heart because, when we say they apply to every believer, that includes you!

You have been forgiven by Jesus’ work as one of His dearly beloved saints. You have a ministry to perform, to function as a priest to one another. You’ve received a unique spiritual inheritance, that God is calling out of you, that is special. I hope these words don’t just apply to “all believers”, but that you let them apply to you!