

20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORDINATION OF REV. MART THOMPSON

Saint Peter & Paul, Apostles

29 June 2008

Zion Lutheran Church

Pevely, MO

SENT....AND STILL GOING

John 20: 19-23

We are here this morning because twenty years ago the Lord Jesus Christ sent W. Mart Thompson to you. No, he did not come to you directly-there were the years at St. John Lutheran Church in Rapidan, Minnesota - where the sending took place that sultry summer afternoon in 1988- Campus Lutheran Chapel in Mankato, Minnesota and Monett, Missouri where he served according to the Lord's bidding. And we do not know what other places the Lord may send him in the years yet to come. But for now, for this time, Pastor Thompson is your pastor. When the Lord calls him away elsewhere be that to another congregation or to Himself in the church triumphant, He will give you another man to serve in the Office that He has established. In the generosity of the Lord's will to be your Savior, Christ Jesus has given you a pastor to preach His words-words which are spirit and life-and to administer His sacraments.

Anniversaries are a time to reminisce, to recall the past always remembering it is God who has brought us to this time and place, redemptive love the reason to paraphrase the words of a hymn. No doubt for you, Pastor Thompson and Cheryl and your family there is much that comes to mind today as you survey these past twenty years. It is a day of deep thanksgiving for you as you think of the Lord's goodness that has sustained you, His promises which have held true, and His mercies new every morning. All of this is precious and it is brought into our glad thanksgiving this Lord's day.

Yet when all is said and done, this anniversary day goes yet deeper for is finally all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead, He did not leave His disciples locked up in fear and uncertainty on that first Easter evening. The Lord came to them and He spoke words that pastors still speak in every Divine Service. He said "Peace be with you." He showed them His hands and His side so that they could see the place where the nails pierced His palms and the gash of the spear in His belly. Then a second time, the Lord Jesus speaks His word of peace. The first time Jesus uttered the words "Peace be with you" He spoke an absolution to disciples, forgiving them of their sin. The second time Jesus spoke that word of peace, He added "as the Father has sent me even so I am sending you." Along with that word, Jesus breathes on His disciples bestows on them His Holy Spirit. "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." With His breath and His words, Jesus makes of His disciples, sent ones, apostles.

Pastors today are not apostles. The apostles were the eye and ear witnesses of Jesus Christ. But pastors are put by the Lord into apostolic ministry, that is, the Lord sends them to do the work of forgiving and retaining sins. When your pastor was ordained these

words of our text were read over him. Jesus sent Pastor Thompson just as surely as with His words and Spirit, He sent the apostles. That has been the confidence of his ministry these last twenty years and that is your confidence as you have received him as the Lord's man, sent here so that you might hear the voice not of Mart Thompson but of the Good Shepherd who calls us out of death to life.

Pastors are sent by the Lord. That means they do not come with their own message, with their own slick programs and notions about Christ and the church and what it takes to make it grow and be successful. Pastors sent by the Lord come with His Word. They are sent to use the words of Martin Luther, to preach one thing the wisdom of the cross. That is pastors are sent to preach Jesus crucified for your sins and raised again for your justification.

Pastor Thompson has been sent. He is not at the end of the road yet. Preachers of anniversary sermons might be tempted to preach as though the one being honored is retiring. Worse yet, a preacher might turn the sermon into a premature eulogy! But we're not going to do that! Rather today is more like a pause. When your pastor and I both served campus ministries in Minnesota we took a group of our students on a backpacking trip in Montana's Beartooth Mountains. You can ask Pastor and Cheryl about it sometime. One of the things hikers do on a trip like that is pause on the trail on the way up to survey the scenery and to see the territory that you've already traversed. I guess that an anniversary service is something like that. You look at where you have been. You recall the faces and the places, you think of people who have been baptized and buried, confirmed and comforted and everything else that is part of pastoral ministry. There are images of joy and grief etched deeply into your mind. But just as a pause on a mountain pass is only a brief break from the rigors of the climb and the hiker finally looks ahead to the peaks that rise above him, so in a service like this, we look ahead with anticipation. Jesus is not done sending you, Brother Mart!

Unlike the backpacker there are no maps that chart out for you how many miles are left until you get to your destination. The beginning of this journey you can see. You know where you have been. You don't know where you are headed. You don't know how many more anniversaries of ordination there will be. But you do know this – the Lord who sent you with His peace, surrounds you that peace and He goes with you to speak through you and to give His word free course. Over the years both in campus ministry and now at the seminary, I have always appreciated that Collect that we often pray at the end of the school year: "Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us grace to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us." That is our prayer for you, Pastor Thompson, today as well.

The peace of the Lord that gave you the boldness to undertake this journey that we know as the pastoral office has accompanied you every step of the way thus far and it will continue in the days and years to come. Pastor and congregation alike live by this peace purchased and won at so great a cost by the Lamb of God. Without His cross, there would

be no forgiveness of sins, And without the forgiveness of sins the ministry would be futile and the church would be empty.

I am authorized not merely to tell you about the forgiveness of sins or even to tell you that there is forgiveness of sins but to forgive your sins for Jesus' sake. That's what pastors do. In the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, pastors speak the forgiveness of sins into the ears of sinners. Dear people of Zion Lutheran Church, that is really what you are giving thanks for today. You are praising God that you have a servant sent by Jesus to bring you the forgiveness of sins in sermon and sacrament. You are blessing God that He has sent you a faithful shepherd to hold before you nothing other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That is why you can say with the Prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Is. 52:7).

Brother Mart, your feet are beautiful for they are set on the path to those who are held captive to their sin and need to hear a word of absolution that sets them free. Your feet are beautiful for they travel the highway that twists and turns through the valley of the shadow of death to proclaim in the face of the grave the truth that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Your feet are beautiful for they walk with the needy and despairing, comforting them with the knowledge that the One whose name is Immanuel has not forsaken them. Your feet are beautiful for they are the vehicle that transports good news. Your feet are beautiful for they are shod with the Gospel of peace.

There is a story that has been floating around for a while about a kid who with his dad was attending an ordination service. When it came to the point in the service for the laying on of hands, the curious lad asked his father "what are they doing now." His dad said "they are taking out his brains." No, when a man is ordained he doesn't lose his brains but rather his brains along with his mouth, his hands, his feet and all that he is and all that he has are taken into the service of the Gospel. In a very real way, your freedom, Brother Mart, was taken from you and you were bound to Christ's Word, to preach it whether people hear it or hear it not. Your personal destiny is tied to God's Word; the gospel that the Lord Himself promises will have free course. We are given to see just a little glimpse of how free a course that Word is having and that is cause for rejoicing here today.

The Lord sent you, Brother Mart. We acknowledge that today with glad thanksgiving, confessing Him to be Savior and Redeemer who goes to such length to get His blood-bought forgiveness to sinners. Even as pause to look at what has been, we also look forward for what is yet to be. There is work yet to do for others still need to hear and hungry sheep still wander harassed and helpless without a shepherd. You have been sent. The journey is not over yet. You are still on the way, still carried along by Jesus' wounds and words, by His Spirit. So we say to you in the words of the Apostle Paul: ".be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in Him your labor is not in vain." Amen.

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