

Installation of Rev. Jason Lane
Celebration Lutheran Church

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Jacksonville, FL

+Jesu Juva+

Preach One Thing- the Wisdom of the Cross

I Corinthians 1:18-2:5

“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2)

The Lutheran theologian, Hermann Sasse – who knew a thing or two about cross and suffering- once said that everything we do in the church must be sterilized by the theology of the cross. That was true for the Apostle Paul who came to the culturally-diverse seaport city of Corinth rampant with superstitious spirituality, prostitution, and immorality. It will be true for you, Pastor Lane, as you commence your service in the pastoral office here in Jacksonville, your own version of Corinth. God has put you here for the same reason that He send Paul to Corinth – to preach a wisdom that is foreign to this and every human culture, the wisdom of the cross. That is, it through the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified, that God wills to bring an end to all the empty and dead-ended ways that people try to rescue their own lives. Paul’s singular message is “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Now that might not seem to fit your new pastor. He knows a whole lot! After all in addition to a Masters of Divinity degree, he has a Masters of Sacred Theology from our seminary in Fort Wayne and has spent the last two years in Germany working on a doctorate. But the Apostle is not speaking here as though the strength of faith means lack of learning. Remember Paul was a master of rhetoric, well-trained by his mentor, Rabbi Gamaliel. Knowing nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified does not mean that you have an empty brain but that every thought is taken captive to this Lord. It means to confess, as we do in the Catechism, that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.”

Human reason is always active trying to secure knowledge of God by speculation. It will not rest in its never-ending search to devise its own projects that it deems would satisfy God. This fleshly wisdom concludes that God will be pleased with me if I develop a godly attitude or if exhibit a lifestyle that is moral. The mind of the old Adam is creative and restless, forever an activist. That is why it cannot but assess the wisdom of the cross to be foolishness. Puffed up in its own pride, the wisdom of this age dismisses God’s work of salvation as an embarrassment.

Paul does not come to Corinth to out-smart the Corinthians. He does come to make God for attractive to them. He comes to preach Christ, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks. It is not with high-blown philosophies or electrifying entertainment that the Apostle seeks to take captive the minds and hearts of his hearers but with the

proclamation of the cross, that is, the announcement that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself through the blood of His Son. So Paul came to the Corinthians, he will say a bit later, not as a peddler of the Word of God but as man commissioned to speak of Christ Jesus and for Christ Jesus.

Paul's own destiny is tied up with the Word of Christ, a Word that will suffer rejection and scorn to be sure. But it is a Word that will not be bound even though Paul finally finds himself in shackles. It is a Word that will grow and triumph because it is the Word of the crucified and risen Lord, a Word that does not return to Him empty of void. It is the Word of the Cross!

It is on account of this Word of the cross that the Lord Jesus Christ established the office of the holy ministry on Easter evening. Risen from the dead, He comes to His men huddled together in fear, behind locked doors. He shows them the marks of the nails and the scare of the spear. He speaks His words of peace and breathes on them His Spirit. As the Father sent Him into the world to redeem the world by His death, so now He sends His apostles: "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained." The redemption done on the cross will not stay back there on Golgotha. It is no good to us there on that "green hill far away.". The redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross must be delivered. The cross must be preached for it is through this preaching that the faith which receives Christ's forgiveness is created. God does not leave His church without the office whose work it is to preach, that is to proclaim and distribute the Word of the cross.

We are here today to install the Reverend Jason Lane as pastor of Celebration Lutheran Church. That is, of course, a reason for rejoicing on the part of both the pastor-elect and the congregation. The man who will be your new pastor has devoted himself to years of study-over and beyond what is required for certification and ordination. He and his family have waited, anticipated, and prayed for this day. The Lord has answered their prayers by bring them here. It is no less a day of thanksgiving for the people of Celebration Lutheran Church as you also waited on the Lord for the gift of new shepherd. You have prayed that the Lord would send you an ambassador of the cross, a servant of His Word. Your prayers are answered.

Today Pastor and congregation will be bound together in and under the Word of the cross. That is why your pastor will confess his submission to the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. He will confess his allegiance to the Book of Concord as a true and correct exposition of the Word of God and he promise to let all of his preaching, teaching, and practice be guided, shaped, and corrected by these Confessions. And you as a congregation will receive your pastor according to these solemn promises, pledging to uphold him with your prayers and honoring him as the shepherd and teacher placed over you in the Lord.

Paul came to the Corinthians according to his own testimony with no small amount of fear and trembling but he came to that congregation in the confidence that he was put there by the Lord, the Lord's servant. No pastor in his right mind would begin his work

without fear and trembling. After all, both pastor and congregation are launching out on a venture of which they cannot see the ending, facing paths and perils unknown to paraphrase and old collect of the church. Where the gospel is preached, there the holy cross will follow Luther reminds us. What crosses are to be borne by pastor and congregation here, we do not know. But together pastor and congregation press on toward the future in the confidence that Christ alone gives in the wisdom and the word of the cross. For His cross is the guarantee that He will never leave or forsake you. It is the sure and certain pledge that you given with His body and blood of the forgiveness of your sins and with that the promise of the final victory.

“Preach one thing-the wisdom of the cross” that was Martin Luther’s admonition in an early sermon. That is what the church is bidding you to do today, in this place, Pastor Lane. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Amen.

Prof. John T.Pless