

Ordination of Andy Wright
Trinity VII

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Lancaster, OH
22 July 2012

Sent with a Word
Romans 10:5-17

We are here today because God has answered a prayer. The Lord Jesus instructed His disciples saying “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, throughout the world congregations have implored the Lord to raise up faithful men for the ministry and equip them for their holy calling that the voice of the Good Shepherd might be heard in all the world. In the ordination service, the church receives an answer to that prayer with praise and thanksgiving. It is fitting that this ordination service is held here at Redeemer Lutheran Church for it was in your midst that Andy aspired to the pastoral office. Here he was taught the faith and encouraged in his studies. You have prayed for him and supported him with your gifts. Now in a very real way the Lord of the harvest is using you as His instrument to send Andy off to another congregation, St. John Lutheran Church in Keystone, Iowa where he will shepherd the Lord’s flock in that place.

All that is going on here today in this ordination service, centers on the fact that it is the Lord who has answered His church’s prayer in sending Andy as His servant to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. You have heard Jesus’ words spoken to the men who would be His apostles-literally His sent ones- on Easter evening: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). And from our text in Romans 10, where Paul poses the rhetorical question, “And how are they to preach unless they are sent? (Rom. 10:15). Ordination is the Lord’s sending of a man to be a preacher of the Gospel, an ambassador of divine reconciliation and a messenger of the good news that in the blood of Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

The Apostle Paul writes that “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). But aspiration is not enough to put a man in the office. It is always dangerous to confuse the aspirations and desires of our fallible human hearts with the mind of God. Andy aspired to the office of ministry. That’s a good thing. Obviously we would not be here this afternoon without Andy’s aspiration to be a pastor. And we are grateful for the way that desire, that aspiration was confirmed and encouraged by his parents and family, by Rebecca, by the pastor and people of this congregation. But that is not what we are primarily gathered here to celebrate today. Nor is it mainly about Andy’s abilities –though they are many and excellent gifts from God. It is not that a man’s ordination day marks a goal accomplished. Ordination is not the marking of status achieved but rather it is being set in place, being put under orders an arduous trek into unknown territories; it is launching out on a venture of which you, Andy cannot see the ending to borrow the language of a familiar old collect of the church.

Ordination is both gift and task. It is gift in that with prayers and the laying on of hands you are endowed with the same Holy Spirit who was given you in Baptism. That Spirit now equips and enables you to preach His Word and care for the flock of which He is making you an overseer. It this Holy Spirit who intercedes for you with sighs and groans to deep for words. It the Lord and Giver of Life who has called you to faith in the Gospel; He now strengthens you in your weakness to endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

To say that ordination is a gift is to confess that the Office of the Holy Ministry is not an entitlement. You have studied hard at Ann Arbor and Fort Wayne. You have demonstrated perseverance and outstanding

academic capacity but these achievements do not alone qualify a man for the pastoral office. He must be sent. And the way the Lord sends a man is through the church, as the church calls a man to serve. Without this call there is no ordination, no minister. Ordination attests to the fact that the Lord through His church has called you into the preaching office. To say that ordination is a gift is to confess that it is not about you but Christ. That is why Lutherans traditionally clothe their pastors with vestments, putting them in the uniform so to speak to demonstrate that when all is said and done it is about Christ and His office; the man who is put there is secondary.

If ordination is gift, It is also task. Ordination puts a man under orders. You are given tasks to perform. They are outlined in the vows which you take. You are under orders to preach God's Word in season and out of season. You are to administer the sacraments in accordance with Christ's institution. Your teaching and preaching are pledged to be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. You are to watch over the flock of God purchased with His own blood. You are to do the work of an evangelist, a Gospel preacher. You are to admonish and instruct with great care and patience. With the law you are to afflict the comfortable and with the Gospel you are to comfort the afflicted. Confronted by the enormity of the task, you might well step back, saying with Paul "who is sufficient for these things?" (II Cor. 2:16). Or to use the words of that heroic teacher of the church that you have spent your graduate year studying, Hermann Sasse: "The deepest nature of this crisis [the crisis of the ministry] lies in the fact that God always demands from his servants something which is, humanly speaking, impossible" ("The Crisis of the Christian Ministry" *The Lonely Way*, Vol. 2, p. 356).

Your sufficiency does not come from yourself, from your own resources but from the Christ who is sending you. Ordination confirms what you already know. You belong to Him who by His precious blood and innocent suffering and death has made you His own. In a few minutes brother pastors will lay their hands on your head. There is a story about a young boy attending an ordination service with his father. When that solemn moment came for the laying on of hands with the pastors encircled around the candidate, the curious kid said to his Dad, "What are they doing?" The father replied, "They're taking out his brains." Well, ordination doesn't extract your brains but it does commit your brains as well as your mouth, your eyes and ears, your hands and your feet – the whole of you- to this singular task of proclaiming Christ and Him crucified. How beautiful indeed are the feet of those who proclaim the good news.

Tomorrow with your earthly belongings in tow you and Rebecca will head to Iowa. You are going there because that is where the Lord is sending you. What awaits you there, no one knows save the omniscient Lord who sends you. No doubt there will be times of great delight when you will be surprised by joy to borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis. No doubt there will also be seasons of suffering and hours of disappointment. There will be exhilarating peaks and cavernous pits. But you go into that future as one who is sent. You go as one who travels at the direction of another with a message that is not your own. That is why the New Testament refers to those who hold office of apostolic ministry as ambassadors. You are Christ's ambassador; His man sent to preach His Gospel. You do not wander aimlessly or stumble around in uncertainty exhausting yourself with expectations for effectiveness imposed by your own imagination or that of others. No, you march with a steady pace as a good soldier of Christ Jesus whose Word alone directs your steps and sheds light on your path. You walk the road of ministry with determined steps and the sure-footedness of a man who is sent.

You go with His gift, with His promise that He will not abandon you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Just as He went with Moses to Pharaoh's throne, He goes with you. Just as He was in the mouth of the prophets, He puts His words in your mouth. Even as He was with the apostles whom He sent with His words of peace, so He is with you to bless and uphold your work. He sends you, Andy, with His words, words which are spirit and life. These are words that will not return empty but accomplish the purposes of the God who now commissions you to speak by His command and in His stead.

You are sent to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified. You are sent into a dangerous and dying world. How dangerous and dying this world is we were reminded by the tragic and senseless slaughter in a Colorado theater early on Friday. There are no guarantees of safety or of human success but you do have the word of promise made certain by the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is raised from the dead and He lives and reigns as Lord of His Church. No one who believes in Him will be put to shame. It is in that confidence that Andy is put into the office of preaching today. His future is with the Lord Jesus crucified and raised from the grave never to die again. So to paraphrase Sasse once more, the church has a future and the ministry has a future because Jesus Christ has a future. That future is yours, Andy. Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless