

Ordination of Jacob Gaugert
17 April 2010 (Saturday in Easter II)

Dr. Martin Luther Lutheran Church
Chicago, Illinois

+Jesu Juva+

The Promise of the Resurrection and the Work you are Given Today
I Corinthians 15:58

We are here this morning in the glow of Easter. That is true chronologically as we celebrated Jesus' resurrection two weeks ago tomorrow. But more than that we are gathered here because the Father raised His slaughtered Son from the grave and the Son alive with wounds to prove He was not a phantom of fatigued apostolic imagination, breathed out His Spirit on the men He had chosen, sending them to forgive sins. The sending that the Lord put in motion on that first Easter evening has not stopped. Today we are here on the receiving end of the Lord's sending. The Lord sends another servant, Jacob, to do what the apostles were given to do, to preach Christ Jesus, forgiving the sins of those who repent and retaining the sins of those who insist on keeping their sins for themselves.

When and where the Lord gives out His gifts there is joy. John tells us that when the disciples heard Jesus speak His words of peace and when they saw His hands and side that they were glad. Certainly there is joy and gladness to go around here today. There is joy for you, Jacob, as today marks the end of a long and winding road of education that would prepare you for this holy office: Undergraduate studies at Mequon, seminary in Fort Wayne and Oberursel, and vicarage in Berlin and Norman, Oklahoma. More than just receiving academic degrees, you have learned the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise into the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. You have studied the Lutheran Confessions and today you will make them your own confession- a confession which you are not ashamed to make before the judgment seat of God's Son. You have mastered languages and delved deeply into church history. You gained a capacity to preach, conduct the liturgy, catechize, and counsel. You have been examined and declared ready by the church to undertake the office of Christ's under-shepherd, to be entrusted with the care of souls purchased and won by the Good Shepherd Himself. Surely today is a day of deep joy for you.

It is also a day of gladness for your parents and family who have supported you with their money and prayers, who have watched you grow as they anticipated this day.

Today is truly a continuation of Easter for the members of Dr. Martin Luther Congregation as you have prayed to the Lord to send you a pastor. You have waited and now your prayer is answered and your waiting is terminated. Your Easter gladness is deepened as this ordination service is reminder that the Lord has not forsaken His flock or overlooked you but given you a man to be your pastor.

But ordination is not so much the celebration of a goal achieved as it is an anticipation of what is to come. So the Apostle Paul says in our text: "Therefore, my beloved brothers,

be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain” (I Cor. 15:58). These words, dear Brother Jacob, anchor you and work the Lord is giving you to do in the promise of His resurrection.

These words come at the end of I Corinthians 15, the great “resurrection chapter” of the New Testament. Paul has reminded the Corinthians of the Gospel which he preached and they received: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4). This is the content of apostolic preaching; this is the message proclaimed by Paul as the Word which has the power to save. But if Christ has not been raised, Paul is quick to add, this preaching is vain and our faith is in vain for we are left in our sins, of all men to be most pitied for this life is futile and the future is without hope. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. He has appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve and more than 500 brethren and finally to Paul himself. Paul goes on for the rest of the chapter to extol the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, the first fruits of those who sleep. By His death, He has defeated death. Death is swallowed up in victory. Yes, sin gives death its sting, its ouch and sin gets its potency from the law. But listen to Paul’s doxology: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is God who gives us the victory through His Son put to death for sin and raised again to give life to all who trust in His name. That is the message, Jacob, you are ordained to preach. C.F. W. Walther in his evening lectures to theological students, transcribed and published under the familiar title, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* reminded future pastors: “Remember when you become ministers, you become helpers of the Christians’ joy” (407). That is a good reminder for you, Jacob. God is today giving good news, glad tidings of great joy to preach: forgiveness of sins for real sinners, life in the midst of death, and hope when the future is dark. It is all true on account of Jesus, the One who died for the sins of the whole world and whose resurrection declares God’s righteousness for all.

You have been taught this Gospel. You believe it. Today you will confess it once again. Today you are ordained to preach. You will announce it week in and week out from the pulpit. You will declare it in the absolution. You will administer it as the Lord uses you as His mouth and hand to wash away sin in Holy Baptism. You will serve it to open and hungry mouths around this altar as you feed them with Jesus’ body and give them to drink of the cup of the New Testament in His blood. You will speak it at bedside and before open graves. It is a word that will pass from your lip into the ears of catechumens young and old. It is a Word that will carry you outside the walls of this church to the streets, workplaces, and homes of this community. It is a Word you will speak in English, and perhaps in Spanish or German. But whatever the setting and whatever the language it remains ever the good news of Good Friday and Easter, of our Brother and Redeemer put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification.

You will sustain the weak and the weary with this Gospel. But this Gospel that you are given to preach will sustain you. For you see, the empty tomb of Jesus is God’s own

guarantee that your future is opened to God's favor and mercy. The words of the Apostle Paul apply to you: "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." By God's grace, you will make such promises to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" as you pledge yourself to the Holy Scriptures and the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions in few minutes. You will freely and willingly give yourself to the work of the ministry, promising to preach the Word in season and out of season, to demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel. Big promises indeed! So large and daunting that they should cause you to tremble a bit! You would be foolish, in fact, to make them were it not for the promise of God that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

The specific challenges that the coming days will bring, we know not. But this much is sure: your labor will not be in vain because Jesus is raised from the dead never to die again. You, Jacob, are beginning a new chapter today. No longer just Jacob, but Pastor Gaugert ordained for a work that will not be void of pain and tears. Yes, the cross and death itself. But you already know the end of the story. When the church in Stuttgart where Pastor Helmut Thielicke was bombed out during the air raids of the Second World War, Thielicke preached to those who were left saying "He who has the victory of the last hour, can endure the next few minutes." We have the victory of the last hour. Jacob, you have the victory of the last hour for Christ is raised and death has no dominion over him or over you. So in the confidence of His resurrection victory go to the work of the ministry with confidence and joy. You have Christ's promise...and that is more than enough. Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless