

ORDINATION OF MICHAEL HOLMEN  
OELWEIN, IA

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH  
27 JUNE 2010 (Trinity IV)

+*Jesu Juva*+

*The Confidence of a Minister of the New Testament*

II Corinthians 3:4-6

Jesus says “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” Michael, you have heard the Word from pastors, your parents, and your teachers. That Word has laid claim over your heart and mind. It has deprived you of whatever freedom you might have claimed for yourself wrestling you and pinning you just as surely as the angel of the Lord had Jacob in his grip back there at the ford of Jabbok in the Book of Genesis. And with tenacity of Jacob you have kept that Word, refusing to let go without a blessing. He has blessed you. Your fate is tied up with the destiny of His Word. It is a Word that has free course as it accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it. And in that Word’s way with you, it was implanted in your thinking to desire that noble task of being a shepherd of God’s flock. So today marks the culmination of years of study and preparation of hearing and keeping God’s Word. These last years have been given to reading and reflection, disputation and discernment. The church has examined you and declared you ready and able to serve as a pastor. These congregations have called you to be their pastor so you are to be ordained, set into the office to preach the Word and administer the sacraments.

But this day is not finally about you, Michael. There are two congregations here who have heard the Word of God. Over the years, God has sent you pastors, preachers to proclaim the Word of Christ, the words which are Spirit and life, words which create and sustain faith in the One who was crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification. You have been blessed through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. Pastors come and pastors go but the Word of the Lord endures forever. That you might continue to be blessed by the Word of our God, you have prayed that the Lord of the harvest would send you a preacher. He has answered that petition. And you are blessed!

In this service of ordination, the church rejoices to receive from the Lord the gift of a pastor, a preacher and servant of God’s Word. Paul’s Spirit-given words in II Corinthians anchor both pastor and congregation in the promise of Christ Jesus, the only sure and trustworthy foundation for the work you are undertaking, Michael, and for the life that you will have as pastor and people together.

Paul speaks of confidence, a confidence that we are given through Christ toward God. This is not the self-confidence of the old Adam, reliant on his own capacities, his own intellect, his own devices. A service of ordination is not so much the celebration of a goal achieved, like finishing a prescribed course of studies and passing a theological interview and now at long last beginning embarking on a paying career as pastor, as it is a confession that this man has no sufficiency in himself; his sufficiency is from God who has made him a competent minister of the New Testament. That is why the church insists that those called to be pastors are bound to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran

Confessions. We don't need pastors who dazzle congregations with their own brilliance or impress the flock with their creativity, or overwhelm the community with their charisma. God desires shepherds who can make no claim to self-sufficiency for their sufficiency is in Christ alone. Like the Apostle, they are men who do not preach themselves but have the courage and boldness to preach no other Savior than that Jew who was crucified as a blasphemer for claiming equality with God by forgiving sins. Ordination, Michael, is not so much about your competence or sufficiency, but about Jesus Christ who has made you competent with something as simple as His promises!

Your competence is from the Lord. As surely as the Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and by His Word and Spirit sent them to forgive the sins of all those who repent and retain the sins of the impenitent, He is today sending you. In a few minutes we'll hang a stole around your neck to remind you and those who hear you of that fact. You have no other authority than that of Jesus' promise. Yours is not a legal authority that would force people to pray, pay and obey. Yes you will exercise the office of the law but its letter can only kill. It is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord and Giver of life. You have nothing to claim but Jesus' words, words of Spirit and life. You have the Gospel.

His words are more than sufficient for the task. Of course, it doesn't seem to be that impressive. The Corinthians didn't find Paul all that credible. His only credentials for apostolic ministry were the marks of his suffering, the bearing of the cross. Paul came to them not with impressive speech or impeccable arguments; He came among them determined to know nothing else than Christ and Him crucified as the wisdom and power of God. That was Paul's apostolic competence. Michael, it is yours as well.

It is given you to stand in front of the text of Holy Scripture to hear it and in hearing it, we repeat it in your reproof and exhortation, in your declaration of convicting law and your consoling proclamation of comfort in the wounds of Christ. It is not given to you to interpret the text so that it conforms to the pattern of your mind but to be interpreted by the text so that your mind is renewed and your lips unlocked to speak the oracles of God. You are finished with your seminary training but you will forever remain a student. Luther said "A Christian is an eternal pupil from infancy onwards" (WA 32, 136, 3f). This is doubly true for pastors. Cease being a student of the Scriptures and you are unqualified to preach. Your sufficiency is anchored in His Word alone.

Dear people of Peace and Our Redeemer Lutheran Churches, you are receiving today from the Lord, a servant of His sending. Christ is giving you a minister of the New Testament, not of the killing letter but of the Spirit who gives life. Because your minister speaks Christ's words from this pulpit, in the classroom, over a cup of coffee, at your bedside, before a gapping grave and all the other places where you need to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, you will have certainty, the certainty that you have a Savior who holds on to you in life and in death. You have a minister of the New Testament and he will not let you forget the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself making peace through the blood of the cross. Receive him as the man that the Lord has put here by His Spirit for you good and blessing.

Dear Brother Michael, soon to be Pastor Holmen, you are embarking today on a path of which you cannot see the ending. What will be in store for you and Jana here in northeast Iowa, in the midst of Peace and Our Redeemer congregations? Of course, we don't know the answer to that question. In all likelihood, the ministry here will embrace both seasons of wonderment and worry, times of deepest joy and profound disappointment. Come what may, face it in the confidence that you have through Christ toward God. The Word He has given you to preach in season and out of season will not return to Him empty. It will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. Luther said that our theology is certain because it takes us outside of ourselves, it draws us into Christ crucified and risen from the dead. His future is your future. His future is the church's future. That is your confidence for ministry. Live in the freedom Christ Jesus gives going to your work in joy for your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Amen.