

The Festival of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor
26 January, Anno Domini 2020
St. Luke 10:1-9
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Texts like those before us today present a unique challenge for preachers. Who wants to hear someone get up and talk about themselves for 15 minutes? And if I did that, I would have missed the point of the Divine Scriptures and the institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry. The last person in the world you want to hear about right now is Kurt Ulmer. And if I stood up here and tried by eloquence or logical exercises or flashy presentations to find something about me for you to be impressed with, why you would want ME to be your pastor, then I would be guilty of a very grievous and sinful error. The pastoral office isn't about me or anyone else who fills it. It is always and only about Christ. Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? Who is Titus? Who is Mark? Who is Kurt? All are servants of God. The office isn't about the man. The man is only the one who fills the office, Christ's office. The man is to be about the work of Christ and distributing the gifts of Christ - proclaiming the Gospel, feeding the flock, teaching the faith, visiting the sick and shut-in, praying for everyone, encouraging, exhorting, and admonishing.

And because the texts before us aren't about me at all but about the office of Christ Jesus Himself, it's actually quite a joy to preach on these texts, to consider with you the great blessing that the Lord has bestowed upon His Church by instituting the pastoral office. It is vitally important that both those who receive the blessings of the office as well as those who are placed into it (who themselves receive the same blessings from the same office) rightly understand the pastoral office - what it is and is not as well as what it is and is not authorized to do. And when we all receive this gift from Christ in faith in the way and for the purposes He has given it, like all things our Lord gives, it is a bottomless well of comfort and joy.

Most importantly, we must begin by recognizing that the pastoral office is not man-made. Christ Himself gave it. And what Christ gives, we need. The things He has instituted aren't optional or frivolous. He appointed the twelve. He sent out the seventy two. Article V of the Augusburg Confession states very succinctly "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted." After Christ ascended into heaven, the disciples didn't sit around looking for the best way to make an effective,

efficient church. Wisely, the Lord didn't leave it up to us to order the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church. And the way He ordered it teaches us what His priorities are for it. The order is very simple - some to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments and all to receive. The priority is just as simple - make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them.

This order is certainly not a structure of power or dominance or control. It is not a structure designed for anyone's personal gain. It's not designed to increase profit margins or maximize the number of customers. It isn't designed to appeal to anyone's individual tastes. It isn't designed around societal and cultural sensibilities. It transcends time and style. It is eternal. Christ's ordering of the Church isn't even designed so that God's ego can be stroked as we all sit around and oooh and aaaah at how majestic and powerful He is. It is an order designed to save all people from divine judgement and eternal death. It is an order designed to continue the ministry of Christ Himself. It is the Savior coming into the midst of us poor sinners to save us, comfort us, weep and rejoice with us and we poor sinners drawing near to the Savior to be saved, to hear His Word of life, to be comforted and strengthened, and to receive the gifts that He gives so that we might be kept safe and secure in the true faith until Jesus returns on the clouds to usher us into eternal life. As such, it is most definitely not an adiaphora, a thing neither commanded nor forbidden. And those who either dismiss or disorder the office do so to their great peril.

That is why, in love for His dear Bride whom He cleansed by His Blood, the Lord Jesus, according to His divine wisdom, established the Office of the Holy Ministry. He established and commanded and gave to His Church an office through which He Himself would continue to speak in all times and places. As St. Mark beautifully and clearly states at the end of his gospel "And they (the apostles) went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs." (Mark 16:20) To paraphrase the Rev. Dr. John Kleinig, the pastor doesn't stand in the place of an absent Christ. The pastor ministers in the presence of Christ, in the stead and by the command of Christ. The resurrected Jesus is present for you in the pastoral office. This is to say nothing more than Jesus Himself said to the disciples "He who receives and hears you, receives and hears me; and He who receives and hears me, receives and hears the One who sent me." Those words aren't only meant as comfort for the disciples but for those who heard the disciples as well. And as He ascended into heaven our Lord promised concerning the office, "Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The love of Christ for you is so great that He wanted to leave you something even more personal and intimate than a book. He gives to you a living

voice to proclaim to you His Word and absolve you of all your sins by His own command. The office of the ministry isn't about you or me but it is most definitely for you and me.

The office of the ministry wasn't given to benefit the man who fills it or to provide him with an opportunity to make a name for himself. Lambs in the midst of wolves. That's Jesus description. Paul was made an apostle for our sake, not his own. Men are placed into the pastoral office for the sake of Christ's Church and for the sake of all who need to hear the Gospel, not their own. The pastor, like John the Baptist is to take the approach "He (Jesus) must increase and I must decrease." The office, not the man, is a gift of Christ to His Church...to you...because of the promises that Jesus has attached to the office and the gifts that our Lord gives through it. Consider the very first words of the penitent in the rite of Individual Confession: "Pastor, please hear my confession and pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill God's will." While the penitent politely says "please", the fact remains that, to the joy and glory of God, he is demanding from the pastor God has given to him, exactly what Jesus has promised to give through the pastoral office and commanded the pastoral office to give - the forgiveness of Jesus Himself. Hear the words of Jesus on that first Easter evening, as He appeared to His trembling disciples in the upper room "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Whoever's sins you retain, they are retained."

Christ gave the pastoral office for essentially one purpose - to deliver the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins and all the blessings that flow from the forgiveness of sins. The pastoral office isn't commanded to be inventive or entertaining. The pastor is not a salesman or a marketing executive. He is not an activities director or an organizer. He is a Seelsorger, a German term which means "soul curate or caretaker". He is to speak nothing more and nothing less than what the Chief Seelsorger, Jesus Christ, has given him to speak. He is a servant and steward of the Lord's things. When your pastor absolves you, that is Christ's absolution. When the pastor admonishes you according to God's Word, that is Christ's admonishment. When the pastor baptizes, that is Christ baptizing. When the pastor distributes Holy Communion, that is Christ giving you His Body and Blood. It's why vestments are helpful. It draws our attention away from the man with his own quirks and personality and style, and instead toward Christ speaking and teaching and feeding through the pastor.

When you really stop and think about it, the Church is essentially the crowds pressing in on Jesus to receive from Him the life that He gives. You are here to

receive life from Jesus. And so every activity of the pastoral office revolves around and is centered in the forgiveness of sins, whether in the Divine Service or any of the other six days of the week. If not, then the pastor is acting outside of his office. When the pastor does that, then neither he nor those entrusted to his care, can be certain that what the pastor speaks is from the Lord. That's a very dangerous position to be in. You want to be certain that whether it is from the pulpit or by your hospital bed or while you are sitting in his office receiving pastoral care, what the pastor speaks is what your Lord speaks, what your Lord has spoken in His Word, not the folly of the pastor's own wisdom. Otherwise, what confidence do you have that it is true? What comfort can you take if you can't be certain that it is the Word of the Lord? That's why you shouldn't seek medical or legal or financial or psychological care from your pastor. He is not only not trained but not authorized to speak about such things. He certainly has thoughts about such things, but he is not authorized to say about them "The Word of God says...". Seek professionals in those fields, through whom the Lord works in other ways for your good. Seek Christ's Word when you go to your pastor and demand nothing less. The tools which Christ gives to the pastoral office to apply to you are the Word of God, prayer, the absolution, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion. When the pastor uses these things faithfully, both he and the one who receives them have the utter confidence that it is Christ Himself who is at work bringing life and salvation, accomplishing His good and gracious will to keep you in His Word and faith until you die.

The Office of the Holy Ministry is a truly precious gift from God. Whatever the name, age, or background of the man who fills it, if he faithfully speaks the Word of God to you and delivers the gifts of Jesus, then give glory and thanks to God. Give thanks to God for bestowing the office of preaching and teaching upon the Church, through which Christ continues His saving and life-giving work, calling sinners to repentance and absolving them of their sins. Pray for, encourage, and support faithful pastors that Christ's work may continue among us and receive them as those who bear on their lips and in their hands the gifts of Christ. Receive them as receiving Christ Himself. And pray that the Lord would continue to send faithful laborers into the plentiful harvest so that there would be no corner of the world where the the Word and precious Sacraments aren't heard and distributed.

In the Name of +Jesus.