

Ordination and Installation
Sermon for Lucas B. Abbott

March 16, 2025

Ephesians 4:11-16:

Our Love and Service for the Triune God

- I. Ours
- II. Pastors
- III. Congregation

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
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Ephesians 4:11-16

Dear Friends in Christ, and dear brother in Christ and Grandson, Lucas,

Fifty-four years ago, if someone would have said to me, "You're going to be a Lutheran pastor of a church in Decatur, Illinois I would have seriously said, "You're out of your mind!" And if the person continued by saying, "Your son is going to be a Lutheran pastor of the same church with you," I would have seriously said, "You need help!" And, then, if the person would have said, "And your son is going to have a son, your grandson, and he's going to be a Lutheran pastor of the same church with you and your son...seriously...I would have walked away!

And so, here we are - the three of us. I must confess to God the words of Job, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2)." And I have to remember the words of Jesus: "...with God all things are possible (Mt. 19:26b)." And Lucas, I must confess, what a blessing and honor for your grandmother and me that the Lord allowed us to live long enough to see this day.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ and beloved brother in Christ and Grandson, on this day of ordination and installation I'm going to examine with you . . .

OUR LOVE AND SERVICE FOR THE TRIUNE GOD

I. Ours

The Lord spoke the following words to the church on earth through the Apostle Peter; spoke for everyone who believes that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone; these words which I considered here several weeks ago: "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possessions, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (I Pt.2:9)." In Christ, Laity and Pastors are priests. We have direct access to God. We proclaim His Word to others; instruct, comfort, and serve. You see, this day is about Our Love And Service For The Triune God.

It's imperative that we understand how God would see us if Christ wasn't in our lives. Paul's words are clear: "...both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles), are under sin...no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, no not even one (Rm.3:9-12)." Yet God, in His great mercy and love, called us to be His and gave us eternal life in Christ. This changes everything for those who believe. The Christian life is not simply a matter of going to church once in a while, reading a little Scripture along the way, some prayers here and there.

Luther wrote. "We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, whereby it serves every other member, all because we have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians... (Daily Readings With Martin Luther, James Atkinson, Editor, Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Il, 1987, p.60)." But there is something else from Luther, that which focuses on this service of ordination and installation:

The Scriptures make us all priests alike, but the church priesthood, now universally distinguished from 'the laity'...is described in Scriptures as a ministry, a service, an office... a guardianship, a preaching office, a shepherd or pastor [Luther calls it "the church priesthood"] (Ibid).

II. Pastors

This brings us to our Epistle lesson for this morning; the words the Lord gave Paul to speak to us:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body

of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the stature of the fulness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

With that Scripture in mind, I'm going to read the following I have written because it's too important to leave out any sentence. Besides, I'm old and memorizing isn't as easy as it was! What I'm going to read is mutually strengthening and a reminder to all Pastors and Laity. And Lucas, everything I'm going to read you have known from very early in life.

You have spent your entire life as a member of this dear Pilgrim congregation. You've spent your life with pastors, and you know that Pastors are called by the congregation - fellow priests - to shepherd them; to lead, protect, and care for the flock. What a tremendous privilege! You are called to preach and teach God's Word. You will be very busy studying for, writing, and delivering sermons and studies. You will be called to minister to the sick and dying. You will often find yourself in Emergency Rooms, Intensive Care and even Natal Intensive Care units. You will often find yourself in Nursing homes and the homes of the homebound. You can and probably will be called out on a special holiday, or a special family gathering, or the middle of the night, or whatever. You will find yourself ministering to a family and their dying loved one. You will probably be there at a time when a dear brother or sister in Christ enters eternity. More than likely, you will deal with the death of a child, and the grief of the family. You will stand before a couple as they enter into holy matrimony. You will baptize sheep into their new life in Christ. You will feed them the Lord's Supper. You will council the troubled heart and mind. You will talk with those who do not know Christ. You will confront the erring. You might find yourself addressing someone in jail, or prison. And you will be confronted by those opposed to you. In every case, you will present the Word of God; God's love in Christ and His will for the redeemed.

Being a Pastor is a calling to a lifetime of service for the Lord and His people. It is not about being successful. It's about being faithful to the Lord and His Word of salvation and eternal life. It is not about presenting our Christian faith as a happy walk with this world. It's the joy and blessing of shepherding God's people through a fallen world filled with conflict, dying, and death. It is not about accepting beliefs in conflict with Scripture. It's about faithfulness to the Triune God and His Word; what He says. Above all, it's always about the sinless Lord Jesus who took our sin and guilt and punishment for sin, nailed it to the Cross with His body, suffered hell, paid for our sin, and took away the condemnation for sin and promised eternal life to those who believe. And without question, it is the constant struggle of the Pastor fighting with his own miserable sin and failures; crying out to the Lord for forgiveness, help, and strength.

Being a Pastor is truly what Scriptures teach: "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph.4:12,14)." Again, I know you know all these things, Lucas, but it is good for all pastors to remember what an incredible blessing, honor and joy it is to be called by God to serve Him as a shepherd of His beloved sheep. We deal with life, and death, and eternity.

III. Congregation

Dear Pilgrim brothers and sisters, and brothers and sisters visiting with us from our sister congregation, Our Redeemer, and all other visitors, all this brings us to you. In his paper entitled, "The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds", C.F.W. Walther, after whom our Seminary is named, wrote:

To be sure it is the holy, inalienable and unassailable right of the whole congregation and of every member to judge doctrine, to prove it, to receive it or reject it. But in the church no one is to rule with force - not even the congregation. Christ says, "They which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise authority upon them; but so shall it not be among you; but whosoever of you will be the (chief) shall be servant of all (Mk.10:42-44)."

As the pastors have stated, it is imperative that the sheep know God's Word in order to discern false teaching, that it has every right to and must approach their shepherds if their preaching and teaching are in conflict with God's Word. At the same time, as Dr. Walther noted, "Neither shall the congregation give orders. It shall not say, this is our will, this we command, thus shall it be, for we are many, and we have the power. No, not man, but God, Jesus Christ, His holy Word alone shall rule among us."

And God's people must hear this word: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give account (Heb.13:17)." The Lord's people are to submit to the Word the Pastor preaches and teaches but not to any whim. And please remember, the Pastor "will have to give account" to the Lord. Lucas, I so often think of the Psalmist's words, "My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments (Ps.119:120)."

And so it is, as our text says, "...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body (the church), joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped ("every joint" - shepherds and sheep), when each part is working properly, makes the body grow (matures and grows strong), so that it builds itself up in love (vv.15-16)."

The pastors have been called by our fellow priests to spiritually lead and strengthen them for that moment when we hear . . .

"...a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev.21:3-4).'"

Lucas, we thank God for giving you a servant's heart. I pray the Lord guide and bless you, your father, and me in the time He has set for us to be together to shepherd this most precious Pilgrim congregation, our brothers and sisters in Christ and fellow priests. All glory be to God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, Amen!

Pastor Bill Abbott