

28 July 2002
Installation of Rev. Daniel E. Grams

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Garfield, NJ

Jesu Juva

“He Who Hears You, Hears Me”

Text: Luke 10:16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is indeed a joyous day at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Garfield, NJ, for the Lord of the harvest has answered the prayers of His people to send laborers into the harvest. Without them the sheep are scattered, but with them they are fed and led to quiet waters. Today He has answered your prayers to send you a pastor, an undershepherd, to bring Christ to you, and to lead you to Christ. The Lord is faithful. You have been given the gift of a pastor. And so we are gathered this day to receive this gift and to return to our good and gracious Lord our thanks and praise.

And to help us better understand today exactly this gift that God has given to His Church, I draw your attention to the Word of our Lord from the Gospel according to St. Luke, the tenth chapter, the first part of the sixteenth verse. This is a Scripture frequently referred to by the Reformers and in the Lutheran Confessions when speaking of the Holy Ministry, and although it is quite brief – in fact, only six words! – it is at the same time profound and a word of great comfort to us. And these words of the Lord from St. Luke are simply these: ***“He who hears you, hears Me.”***

Jesus spoke those words to His disciples as He was about to send them out ***“into every town and place where He Himself was about to go.”*** They were to be His laborers, sent at a specific time and a specific place with a specific task and commission and authority. They were to speak what they had been told. They were to do what they had been given to do. They were to give what they had been given to give. And as they did, there would be no mistake about it – they were not speaking and doing and giving from themselves, they were representing the One greater than they. They were speaking and doing and giving on His behalf, in His stead and by His command. And so when they gave it was Christ giving. When they spoke it was Christ speaking. ***“He who hears you, hears Me.”***

Now the first thing to notice about these words is that our Lord wants to be heard. He wants to speak to His people. He is not a silent, mysterious God, so that we have to wonder about who He is and what He desires and what is His will. No, He is a God who speaks. He speaks from the very beginning, when His Word created everything that exists, and He

speaks until the very ending, when at His Word the angels are dispatched to gather His faithful into His Kingdom. He is a speaking God, and He wants to speak to you. He wants to give to you all that He is and all that He has. To give to you His Word and His Name and His Presence. And so to do that there must be one who speaks, in His stead and by His command. For the Word of God does not come to us from the ruminations or meditations of our own hearts. It does not come to us apart from means. And so in His wisdom, God in Christ has established such an office, the Office of the Holy Ministry. To speak His Word to His people, so that ***“He who hears you, hears Me.”***

And this office is unlike any other. Other occupations and professions are measured by hours and days, by seniority and popularity. They are measured by production and sales quotas, by advancing from one position to another, one step of the ladder to the next. They can be measured by financial success. But the compulsion to preach the Gospel is not determined by dollars, prestige, or honor. The Office of the Holy Ministry is not a human position of human invention, but a supernatural office, established by God in Christ, the chief pastor of the church. Most occupations come and go and if they stay, skills must be changed. A hundred years ago shoeing a horse was a necessary occupation. An auto mechanic trained in 1940 would have no idea of the computer systems of our cars. But the Holy Ministry is different. It does not change. It was held by prophets and apostles and sainted pastors before us. Its message in proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Christ remains the same. For as St. Paul warns the Christians in Galatia, a contemporary or updated “gospel” is no gospel at all.

And so today your prayers have been answered. The Lord of the Church has given you a pastor, to stand *“in His stead and by His command.”* A Pastor to speak for Him, and to give for Him. And so you have a pastor who is here to give. He will be an undershepherd who will follow the example of the Good Shepherd and give of Himself to you. He will be here for you and giving to you in the Divine Service. But not only here. He will be with you in the sickroom, in the hospital, in your homes, in the funeral home, in wherever you are, to young and old, rich and poor, high and low alike, in joy and in sorrow . . . to give to you all that He has to give. And what is it that He will speak and give? He will speak and give exactly and only what He has been given to speak and give. What He has been given to give to you by our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord in Holy Absolution, the Word of the Lord combined with water in Holy Baptism, the Word of the Lord combined with bread and wine in Holy Communion. These He will give to you whoever you are and wherever you are. But these only can He give. He is not free to speak whatever He wants. He is not free to do whatever He wants. He can only give what He has been given to give. He is not an employee with one hundred or more employers. He is not a hired hand, here today and gone tomorrow. He comes to you in Christ’s stead, as His minister for your sakes.

For Ministers do not simply do jobs. Your pastor has no *alter ego* when he goes home at night, because Ministers become what they preach and they preach what they believe. It is a burden which they can never escape. To bring Christ to you. To bring to you His forgiveness and His Word. That you hear the voice of your Good Shepherd through His faithful undershepherd.

And make no mistake about it! In giving you the Word of the Lord, you will not be hearing just the voice of a man! ***“He who hears you, hears Me.”*** You have Jesus’ promise that you will be hearing Him. Not because your new pastor is so learned, and not because He is better than you or so pious and holy – but because you have Jesus’ promise. Because Jesus has answered your prayers and given you a pastor in the Office of the Holy Ministry that Christ Himself has established. And so when you hear your new pastor say in the absolution, *“I forgive you all your sins”* – you are hearing the voice of your Good Shepherd. When your new pastor baptizes adults and children, it is your Good Shepherd making sinners into His children. When your new pastor speaks the Words of the Lord over bread and wine in Holy Communion, it is your Good Shepherd who is your host and your meal. Luther said, *“The voice and the hands are those of a man, but it is really and truly the voice and hands of your Shepherd, giving to you.”* Giving you Himself and all that He is and all that He has.

And Pastor Grams, remember always in whose stead you are standing. Who you are representing. And whose words you are speaking. It will not always be easy. It will sometimes take great courage. And it will sometimes bring you hardship and heartache as you worry about God’s people. Preaching will be both a joy for you and a struggle, as you wrestle with the Word of God and how to proclaim it faithfully, with both clarity and charity. Prayer, meditation, and tribulation will make you a theologian and a pastor. But this promise of Christ that we heard today is not only for your people, but also for you. To reassure you that ***“He who hears you, hears Me.”*** That you know that Christ will work through you and will bless your efforts. And those blessings may be in ways that are not always easy to see. It may sometimes seem as if your work is unappreciated and not making any difference at all! But as you remain faithful His Word will do its work. His Word is making an everlasting difference in the lives of those who hear and believe.

For what a message you have been given to speak! The message of our God who came in the person of Jesus Christ to save us! The message of our Saviour who died and rose so that we who die might rise again to eternal life! The message that although we are sinners, condemned by the Law, that in Christ we have been made saints. The message that in Christ we have been made sons of God and able to pray to our Father who is in Heaven. The message that Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension is not just a story among many stories, but that this story becomes the personal story of every Christian who, by grace alone, has been baptized into Christ for absolution and communion with Him in the

forgiveness of sins. And this is the message that God wants heard, and not just once or twice, but over and over again. And so this is the message your pastor will preach. And he will never tire of preaching it, for your pastor knows that what is now to him a new responsibility and may tomorrow be a burden is to him an underserved gift. For it is a gift that he not only gives, but which he also receives.

Because he is a sinner. Make no mistake about that! For although in this Office he stands “*in the stead and by the command*” of Christ, your new pastor is not Jesus. He is a sinner, as I am, and as all his brothers in office here today are! He has shortcomings, of which I’m sure you will become aware, and he will need the forgiveness of His Saviour, and your forgiveness. Yes, he will need your forgiveness. And no one will be more aware of his sins and shortcomings than your pastor himself. You do not need to point them out – he knows. And with them he will struggle. But although He is a sinner, and as unworthy as he may be, and we all may be, your Lord has chosen him, and through the Divine Call of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church has placed him into the Office of the Holy Ministry here to be His representative. To tend this flock that has been entrusted to his care. And it is a daunting task.

For your pastor is going to be attacked. As a baptized Christian he joins you among those who are the enemies of Satan and whom Satan attacks tirelessly and relentlessly, night and day. But now also as a pastor, Satan will attack him even more furiously because he is a leader among God’s saints. Jesus promised to pray for Peter because Satan would sift him like wheat. Well, by your pastor’s preaching of the Word of God, the Word that is “*the power of God for salvation,*” Satan falls like lightning from heaven and is forced to flee and his kingdom is destroyed and Christ’s kingdom is established. And Satan likes this no more than wasps like their nests destroyed – and so he will attack both the message **and the messenger**. And so we offer up our prayers and petitions today for you, Pastor Grams, that you will be faithful even unto death. That you may rejoice when the attacks of the evil one come, for you know that your name is written in Heaven, and that when the chief shepherd appears he will give you a crown of life.

And so dear brothers and sisters in Christ, receive your new pastor today as the gift that he is for you. And as he speaks to you God’s Word, hear this Word. That is what you will promise in just a short time now. For you know that as you hear him, you will be hearing the voice that you know best – the voice of your Good Shepherd. And so hear him! When he offers you new opportunities to study the Scriptures, hear! When he proclaims the Word of God from the pulpit, hear! When he comes to visit you, and counsel you, and even when he must admonish you, hear! For in sending him to you, Christ has also sent His promise, that “*He who hears you, hears me.*” And as you hear, you will be blessed by your Lord, receiving His gifts or forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And Pastor Grams, ***“Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.”*** For Christ’s Gospel is your Gospel and His people are now your people. Today you greet us in the prayer “the Lord be with you” and in response we pray “and with your spirit.” We pray that the Spirit which is already yours in Baptism may make you bold to pray with us, to preach to us, and to celebrate the holy mysteries of Christ’s body and blood for us. And know that this day we pray not alone, but with Jesus who prayed to His Father for His disciples and who still prays for you, His minister. God’s richest blessings to you Pastor Grams, and to you saints of Holy Trinity, as you begin your blessed time together today as pastor and people.

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