

ORDINATION OF CHAD HOOVER
13 JUNE 2004

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
TRAVERSE CITY, MI

+*Jesu Juva*+

The Confidence of a Competent Minister
II Corinthians 3:4-11

*O Spirit, who didst one restore
Thy Church that it may be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be men whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee. Amen.*

Today the Lord has answered the prayer of Martin Franzmann's majestic hymn as a man is given to the church as a pastor, to be your pastor. Every ordination service reminds us that even in these gray and latter days, the Lord has not forsaken His church but sends men whose life is praise, a high doxology to the Holy Trinity. Therefore today is a day of deep thanksgiving both for the candidate and the congregation. For you, Chad, this day marks the culmination of years of study and reflection, of prayer and work. Indeed it is a time to pause in thanksgiving to the Lord who has brought you to this time and place as you recall all the people and events that have shaped your life and in the providence of God have made this day a reality. It is no less an occasion of gratitude for Trinity congregation. Now another servant is coming alongside of Pastor Zagore to share with him the pastoral office so that God's flock in this place might be cared for with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ordination day is day of thanksgiving but also of anticipation. Who is this man fresh out of seminary and what will he be like? That is a question -even if it is unspoken- that might be on the minds of many of you today. And Chad, you might have some questions yourself. What will this congregation be like? Am I ready for the challenges of being a pastor?

We turn to God's Word which we heard from II Corinthians 3:4-11, the epistle appointed to be read in the ordination service. This Word of God addresses two issues for both the pastor and the congregation: **Competence** and **Confidence**. Much is made these days of pastoral fitness. The pastor is rightly expected to be competent both in character and in ministerial crafts of preaching, teaching, and the care of souls. After dozens of classes, two years of field work at Zion Lutheran Church in Garrett, Indiana and a year of vicarage at Luther Memorial Chapel in Shorewood, Wisconsin, the man who is about to become your pastor has been examined and declared competent. We may be tempted to think of that as achievement. Knowledge has been acquired. Skills have been honed. Impressive as that is, it is not yet the competency of which the Apostle speaks. Paul says

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us to be competent ministers of a new covenant (that is, the new testament), not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

It is God who makes men competent ministers of the New Testament. In a few minutes your pastor-elect will make some vows. They are God-sized promises. He will pledge faithfulness to the Scriptures as the very Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as correct expositions of that divine Word. He will promise to conform his teaching and pastoral work to their doctrine. He will promise to faithfully minister in all the circumstances of living and dying. He will pledge to adorn the office of the ministry with a holy life. These are the things that you can count on your pastor for. The weight and all-inclusiveness of these vows ought to cause you, Chad, to tremble a bit. Left to your own resources they would be impossible. If it depended on you it would be doomed from the beginning.

Your learning, your personality, your people skills, the strength of your Christian commitment, even your ardent desire to be a pastor are insufficient grounds. Your sufficiency is in Christ Jesus and Him alone. By His Gospel, He called you out of darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, and from death to life in your Baptism. Now through His church, He has called you into the office of the holy ministry.

A young boy once attended an ordination service with his parents. When it came to the point of the laying on of hands, the inquisitive lad his father, "What are they doing now?" His dad replied "They are taking out his brains." No, ordination does remove your brains. But it does put your brains, your mouth, your hands, and your heart into the service of Jesus' Gospel. Ordination does not make of you a different man but it does but you under orders as servant sent by the Lord as His mouthpiece. Every thought is taken captive to Christ. Your tongue is given to speak not your words, but His words. Your hands will bless with His blessing as He uses them to baptize in His name and to feed sinners with His body and blood.

Christ Jesus carries the action of the verbs. Only when Christ does it can we be sure and certain. The Catechism's "This is most certainly true" can be said only of what Jesus does. It is not our Gospel, but His for He is the One who lived under the Law for us, was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification. It is His ministry for it is Christ says the Apostle "who has made us competent to be ministers of the New Testament." There are those who commandeer the verbs for themselves and so speak for doing the Gospel. Some pastors speaking of doing ministry. If we are left with the verbs, it is unsure. Luther diagnoses it as robbing Christ of the glory that belongs to Him alone as the only Savior and troubled consciences of blood bought peace.

Christ does it all. The *Large Catechism* puts it like this: *Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive as Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for*

us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not remain buried but be put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption (LC II:38, Kolb/Wengert, 436). The work of redemption is done. The death Christ died, He died for sin once and for all. Raised from the death, He lives to give life and salvation to all those who trust in Him. Redemption done on the cross still needs to be delivered. The Risen Lord sets that delivery in motion on Easter Evening. We heard of that in today's Holy Gospel from John 20. Standing in the upper room where the disciples were held up in fear, the Lord Jesus speaks His words of peace, showing them His hands and side, breathing on them the breath of His Spirit, He makes of these men apostles, sent ones. *Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you...If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.* With Jesus' Word and Spirit, the gifts of Calvary-forgiveness of sins are now delivered.

Paul puts the Gospel in contrast with the Law. The Law, the written code carved in tablets of stone had its own glory. The minister of the Law, Moses glowed with its fading light luster. The Law kills, but the Spirit who works in the Gospel gives life. The Law dispenses condemnation. The Gospel dispenses righteousness. Yes, Brother Chad, you will proclaim Moses. You will preach the Law in all of its severity to expose sin and put sinners to death. But you are not a minister of Moses, a servant of the old covenant with its ever- diminishing glory. You are a minister of the New Testament, put here to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in the blood of God's own Son. You are a minister of the Gospel, the Gospel that completely eclipses the Law with its splendor. No one is ever saved by the Law. It is the splendor of the Law that it reveals our sin. It is the glory of the Gospel that it reveals the fatherly heart of God in the face of Jesus, a heart that beats with mercy and compassion for broken sinners.

This Gospel is the source of your confidence. You are delivered from the burden of a "do it yourself" ministry. That is only Law. And the Law always accuses and crushes. Today you are put into the office of the Gospel. In a few minutes, we'll wrap a stole around your neck. The stole is your yoke. Just like an ox was put under a yoke, you are now under stole. But the yoke that you will bear is not the burden of the Law but the yoke of Christ, the Gospel. Your confidence is fixed in Him and not in yourself. Remember the words of our text: *Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God.*

That was true for Paul and it will be true for you also. It all hangs on Christ. That is why Paul wrote *For I decided to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified (I Corinthians 2:2).* Luther called it the theology of the cross. *Crux sola est nostra theologia*-the cross alone is our theology. Hidden under the shame and suffering of the cross is splendor of God's glory to justify the ungodly, to give righteousness to the unrighteous, to bring life where there was only death. Only Christ can do that. In His good and gracious will to be our Savior, He has chosen and called you to be His instrument. And you, the good people of Trinity rejoice today because God in His mercy

has given you such a servant. Your new pastor comes to you as a gift from the Ascended Christ. The Lord has put him here in your midst to serve you with His Word and Sacraments, to be your shepherd in Christ.

To be on the receiving end of Christ's gifts is how both pastor and congregation live. That is where God locates us today. In the confidence that it is the Lord's doing that this man, Chad Hoover, is called to be one of your pastors you can receive Him as Christ's servant for your sake, supporting him, encouraging him, praying for him and working with him

And it is in that confidence, Brother Chad, that you now take up the office to which you have been called, knowing that your diligence is not lost for it is the work of Jesus Christ. He promises to be with you through it all...in the those high points of unspeakable joy as you watch the Word at work in sometimes unexpected ways the lives of the people committed to your care...in those hours of monotony and drudgery that are also part of pastoral work...in times of deep sadness and disappointment for heart break is no stranger to faithful pastors.. Preaching the Word in season and out of season, Christ Jesus will be with you ever true to His promises producing through you fruit that will abide for time and eternity. What Christ does, He does for keeps. It is permanent. The glory of His Gospel never fades away in the dust of human history. Your confidence is in Him for He has made you to be a competent minister of the New Testament. So *"be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

And so we pray in the words of the Reformation hymn-writer:

*The cause is yours, the glory too.
Then hear us, Lord, and keep us true.
Your Word alone our heart's defense.
The Church's glorious confidence (Selnecker).*

Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, IN