ORDINATION OF BRYCE WANDREY
TRINITY LUTHERAN, ELGIN, MN
TRINITY III
6 JULY 2003

+Jesu Juva+

ORDAINED TO RECEIVE SINNERS
St.Luke 15:1-10

O Spirit, who didst once 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 (Martin Franzmann).

So the church prays in the words of Martin Franzmann's majestic hymn. Today we give thanks that God has yet again answered that prayer. According to the Lord's bidding, the church prays Sunday after Sunday that the Lord of the harvest would send workers in the fields that are ripe, grain ready for harvesting. Today Trinity congregation and indeed the whole church rejoices that God has raised up a man from your midst, baptized in this very font, confirmed at this altar, nourished with Gospel and Sacrament in this place, upheld by your prayers, and supported by your gifts to be shepherd of God's flock. The Apostle Paul says if a man aspires to the office of bishop, that is, pastor, he aspires to a noble task. Bryce came to aspire to that office. But aspiration alone is not enough to make a man a pastor. Years of study and prayer, challenges and testing are necessary. He engaged in such study at St.Olaf College, University Lutheran Chapel, Concordia Theological Seminary, Westfield House, and a year of vicarage at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Streator, Illinois. There was testing-not only the exams given in classrooms but the kind of testing that God does as His Word intersects with life under the cross. Finally, Bryce was examined and found ready. A call came from the Lord's congregation at Augustana Lutheran Church in Hickory, North Carolina. So we are here today as the Lord now puts Bryce into the Office of the Holy Ministry. As surely as the Lord's Apostles were sent on that first Easter evening, so surely is Bryce being sent this Sunday afternoon to preach the Gospel, baptize, absolve, and distribute the body and blood of Christ.

There is joy in this ordination. Surely this day brings joy to you, Bryce, as it marks the culmination of your studies that have prepared you for the work that you are about to begin. It is a day of joy for parents who brought you to the waters of Holy Baptism, taught you God's Word, and supported you in your decision to study for the Ministry. It is fitting that you are ordained here at Trinity Lutheran Church where you were nurtured in the faith and encouraged in your pilgrimage to the seminary. But there is yet a deeper joy one that is hidden from our eyes and ears-yet nevertheless, real. It is the rejoicing that our Lord Jesus speaks of in today's Holy Gospel. It is the high joy of heaven itself, the
rejoicing of the angels over sinners who repent. For Bryce is being ordained to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

In a few minutes, Bryce will kneel before the altar and be ordained with the laying on of hands. A young boy once attended an ordination service, like this one. He was curious as the pastors huddled around the candidate placing their hands on his head. So he asked his father, "What are they doing to him?" In an attempt to satisfy the lad, his father said "They are removing his brains." While some may think that a man would have to be brainless to go into the ministry in these gray and latter days with all the difficulties that face pastors and all the troubles that beset the church, ordination is not about the removal of your brain, Bryce. Rather with the Word of God and prayer, your brain is consecrated for the service of the Gospel. Every thought is taken captive to Christ. And not your brain only but your eyes that look with compassion and mercy on those for whom Christ died. He sanctifies your ears to listen to the cries of those who confess their sins. He takes your tongue and uses it to declare His word of forgiveness. He hallows your hands to bless and your feet to go out to rescue those who stumble along, heading into the shadows of death in a futile attempt to run away from their Creator. The whole lot of you is set apart and put under orders to do the work of a shepherd. Your life is now cast in the image of the Good Shepherd to seek and to save the lost. Our Good Shepherd is the Lord who receives sinners and eats with them. So it is for those who are under-shepherds of Jesus Christ.

Shepherds do not wait for the sheep to find their way back to the fold. Shepherds go out in search of sheep that are wandering aimlessly in rocky ravines or entangled in a ticket. Shepherds rescue their sheep from ravenous wolves. Shepherds guard their sheep from thieves who would steal the sheep. Shepherds are not ranchers who have decided to manage the sheep, but shepherds who tend to the sheep one by one. Our Lord Jesus Christ identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. He is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and is known by them. His sheep know His voice and follow Him out of death and into life.

Pastors are shepherds. To be a shepherd is not to keep a few sheep around as pets. To be a shepherd is not to use the sheep for your own purposes. In the Old Testament, God judged those false shepherds who fed off the flock rather than feeding the flock. To be a shepherd is not to beat the sheep into shape. Or as Peter says in his first epistle, "Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock (I Peter 5:2-3). To be an under-shepherd of the Chief Shepherd is to bear the burdens of the sheep. It is to receive sinners and eat with them for the Good Shepherd who sends pastors to His church is the One who was known as the friend of sinners.

The Good Shepherd went to the cross for His wayward sheep, for this scattered flock, for His sheep who love to wander. He laid down His life as a sacrifice of atonement for sins of the world. He did what no pastor can do. He paid the price of our rebellion. In His own body, He absorbed our sin as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the Reformation era art, it was often the case that artists painted John the Baptist with an out of proportion finger pointing to the Lamb of God indicating that John was simply
the one who directed people to the Messiah. That is what pastors do. They point not to themselves but Christ. That is why we cover a man with robes so that the congregation does not see him, his sins, and his inadequacies but Christ whose man he is.

Bryce was claimed to be Christ's man as you were claimed in Holy Baptism. Now he is claimed in another way. It is not in the way that would give him a greater holiness or superior status. There is no indelible character other than the righteousness of Christ which is always outside of ourselves and our doing. Today the Lord Christ, the one who receives sinners and eats with them, sets Bryce into the office that He Himself has established so that the forgiveness won for us on Calvary's cross might be proclaimed and distributed. That is what the Office of the Holy Ministry is given to do. The confession of our church, the Augsburg Confession, puts it like this: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, when and where he wills, in those who hear the gospel" (AC V:1-3). Here Christ Himself uses the mouth of a man to speak His words, words that are spirit and life. He uses the hands of a man to wash away sins in Holy Baptism and serve sinners with Christ's own body and blood.

There was a time when men wrote books with such high-sounding titles as "the romance of the Ministry" or "the glory of the pastorate." We don't often hear such language today. Perhaps it is just as well, for the work of the ministry is often not very glorious to the human eye. There is no romanticism is taking care of sheep that smell with the stench of sin. There is no apparent glory in those "moth-eaten saints with moldy breath" who will gather before you Sunday after Sunday. Many would see the life that you are undertaking a waste. In England, if you want to insult someone, you describe him as "worthless as a clergyman."

Faith relies not on what it sees but on what God promises in His Word. When all is said and done, that is all that the pastor has to rely on, the Word of the cross. It is that Word that creates faith and sustains the saints of God under affliction and cross, in suffering and in death. It is that Word that will go forth from your lips, Bryce, accomplishing the purpose for which God sent it. Wherever that Word is preached in truth and received in repentance and faith, there the holy angels that adore the Blessed Trinity, will revel in a rejoicing so magnificent that is would break our hearts into a thousand pieces if we could take it all in. Lived in faithfulness to Christ Jesus and His Word, your life as His servant will be one of high doxology. God grant that there be much rejoicing in heaven as lost sheep hear from your mouth, the voice of the Good Shepherd and hearing Him have life in His name. To that end, God keep you steadfast to the vows you make this day and give you to share in the joy of the angels over sinners brought to repentance and faith. Amen.