Sunday after Sunday, at altars around the world God’s holy Christian people call out to the Lord of the harvest in prayer, imploring Him to send laborers into His harvest field. Today that petition is once again answered as Christ Jesus sends Nathan to preach His Gospel. Therefore today is a day of thanksgiving to God who is faithful to His promise in giving to His church another pastor. Yes, it is a day of joy for you Nathan that your years of study and preparation have culminated in a call to Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Paul and ordination into the office of the holy ministry. It is a great day for your family and friends who have supported you with their prayers, words of encouragement and gifts. But above and beyond that it is day of high and holy thanksgiving for the whole church as your feet are now set on the path to carry God’s good news of forgiveness of sins and peace with Him in the blood of Christ to the world.

Your fervor, Nathan, to proclaim this saving Word is well-known. Your ability to do it is without question. Your confession of Christ’s truth is certain and clear. You have demonstrated that constancy and dedication to the task not only on campus in the classroom and with the student mission society but also with a vicarage in the intercity of Baltimore, and this past year your work in Madagascar and on behalf of the Malagasy Lutherans. But this track record, as impressive as it is, is not yet enough to make you a pastor.

You must be sent. No prophet of the Old Testament, no apostle of the New Testament launches out on his own. They are all sent—sometimes against their will and even while uttering a litany of their own inadequacies. Think of Moses who argues with God that he lacks the gift of public speaking or Jeremiah who thinks that his youthfulness might be a detriment to the prophet office. Nevertheless, the Word of the Lord comes to them and they are sent to speak it. In the New Testament, the Word made flesh still bearing in His body the marks of the nail and the gash of the spear comes into a locked down room of fear-bound disciples in the twilight of Easter evening and He sends them with the same words you will hear this afternoon: “Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

That, Nathan, is the only sure ground of your confidence. The Lord is sending you. That is really what mission is about. It is not about sweaty enthusiasms or programs or movements. It is the Lord sending His men, commissioning them as His ambassadors to preach Christ for the forgiveness of sins. You are sent to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified for God creates faith through the preaching of the Word of the cross. Martin Luther who was ordained 500 years ago this very year, put it most succinctly “Preach one thing, the wisdom of the cross.”
You have known that wisdom as from a child you have learned the Holy Scriptures which as Luther says is a book that turns all human wisdom on its head. In preparation for the preaching office into which you will now be ordained, you have searched those Scriptures. In a few minutes you will make a solemn vow that binds you to them for they are the Word of God and it is only through them that sinful human beings are made wise to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Their message is now your message. The words that the Holy Spirit gave to prophets and apostles are now given you to proclaim.

In our text, the Apostle quotes the Prophet Isaiah, “how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.” Your feet are beautiful for they are set on the path to those who are held captive to their sin and need to hear a word of absolution that sets them free. Your feet are beautiful for they will travel the highway that twists and turns through the valley of the shadow of death to proclaim in the face of the grave the truth that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Your feet are beautiful for they will walk with the needy and despairing, comforting them with the knowledge that the One whose name is Immanuel has not forsaken them. Your feet are beautiful for they are the vehicle that transports good news. Your feet are beautiful for they are shoed with the Gospel of peace.

There is a story that has been floating around for a while about a kid who with his dad was attending an ordination service. When it came to the point in the service for the laying on of hands, the curious lad asked his father “what are they doing now.” His dad said “they are taking out his brains.” No, in becoming a pastor you don’t lose your brains but rather your brains along with your mouth, your hands, your feet and all that you are and all that you have are taken into the service of the Gospel. In a very real way, your freedom, Nathan, is taken from you and you are bound to Christ’s Word, to preach it whether people hear it or hear it not. Your personal destiny is tied to God’s Word; the gospel that the Lord Himself promises will have free course.

That Word will travel and it will carry you along with it to every place where people are languishing in the blindness of unbelief. God has put a Word on the lips of His preachers that accomplishes a miracle on par with creation itself. In the beginning God spoke, saying “let there be light” and no one had to grope around for an electrical switch. His Word called light out of nothingness. So also the Word which God gives you to speak creates faith. The Word of God says what it does and it does what it says. You, Nathan are sent to preach that Word for as the Apostle says, how can they hear without a preacher. And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Nathan is sent today. His feet are set on a steady course for he goes at the behest of the Lord Jesus Christ who has called him through the church to the pastoral office. For a pastor to be sent means that he does not run around with frenzied anxiety as though the church would be built and the kingdom extended through his busyness. To be sent is to go out as a man under orders. You take your directions from Christ. It is His Word you are given to preach and His sacraments you are now ordered to administer. This is the work of the ministry that is committed to you today.
It is all for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors come and pastors go. A hundred years from now Nathan may or may not be remembered. They may name a parish hall after him or they may not. They may hang his portrait in the narthex after he’s dead and gone. Or they may not even be able to remember his name, who was that young pastor who came over here from Wisconsin….you know, the one who was such a Packers’ fan? Whatever happened to him? In the end, it really doesn’t matter for it is not about him. It is about Jesus Christ and pastors are His servants, stewards of His mysteries. It is a good thing when people remember pastors who have served them well, but it is of far greater importance-eternal importance-that people remember the One that pastor’s proclaim- Jesus Christ. You may forget the pastor who proclaimed Him to you, but don’t forget Jesus Christ. He is the Savior who died to forgive you your sins and He was raised again for your justification. Pastors proclaim Him so that God may indeed work faith in the hearts of those who hear the Gospel.

Today Nathan is sent to proclaim that one, saving Gospel for faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ. As he is sent, let the words of the old Lutheran hymn be our prayer and our confession:

And for Your Gospel let us dare
To sacrifice all treasure;
Teach us to bear Your blessed cross,
To find in You all pleasure.
O grant us steadfastness in joy and distress,
Lest we, Lord, You forsake.
Let us by grace partake of endless joy and gladness.

Amen.

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