

The High Calling Of The Ministry

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The Lord never said it would be easy to serve him. He told his disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Christians will not have it easy. This is even truer of those called by the Lord to serve him in the public ministry. When Jesus sent the twelve out to preach, he told them: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves" (Mt 10:16). He warned them: "Be on your guard against men." They could expect to be arrested and flogged and expect the same treatment he had received. After all, "a student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master."

The assignment you have given me is to present a paper on THE HIGH CALLING OF THE MINISTRY. The letter that explained this assignment pointed out that "pastors, especially in our mission efforts, are so very often faced with discouraging set-backs in growth, in outreach, and in personal endeavors." This conference is to emphasize the blessedness of your calling, to encourage you to carry on the mission of the Great Commission, especially in the face of trials and discouragements. Through the Holy Spirit's power you hope to return from this conference with spirits and energies uplifted, refreshed by the Gospel, motivated anew to carry on. That is a big order. I would shrink from it if I didn't know that with God all things are possible. He is strong in our weakness.

Possibly one area in which the seminary fails in its training of young men for the ministry is that it does not remind them sufficiently of the disappointments they may experience. Assignment day is a day of excitement. On graduation day the student is ready to go out and conquer the world for Christ. Yes, there may be fears and apprehensions in the back of his mind. But these are pushed into the background by a certain feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction and by what he knows to be true: that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. At last he can put into practice what he learned during many years. He has been taught to preach and, being a student, people have been kind to him and have spoken well of his preaching. Now he is going to preach in a way that people will flock to his church. They will come because they will want to hear the true Word of God he has been taught to proclaim and proclaim well. The children in instructions will be inspired to be willing learners. The Word of God is powerful, it is going to make his ministry successful. He is going to give it his best. God will not let him down.

He has been told to reach out to the unchurched. They are out there in need of the gospel and are waiting for him. He feels some anxiety about canvassing, about knocking on strange doors. But somehow things will happen. His church cannot help growing.

Six months pass. A whole year. Things haven't happened as he expected. Church attendance may have increased, but not nearly according to his expectations and on some Sundays is downright poor. The congregation has not grown as he thought it would. Soon a good member moves away, perhaps two. He is also discovering that there are delinquents in the congregation. A husband and wife who, he thought, were well adjusted and fine Christians are having marital problems and don't appear to respond to the Word. He begins to wonder about himself. Am I really fit for the ministry? And about God. Real life in a congregation doesn't seem to correspond to God's promises. It all sounded so easy at the seminary. You all know the disappointments and not only during the first year or two of your ministry.

But they aren't really different from those our Savior experienced. He knew what it meant to preach a beautiful gospel sermon, only to have people turn away from him and even threaten to kill him. Remember Nazareth. He knew what it meant for people to reject him. Remember Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. He felt deep sorrow when he wanted to help and was rejected. Remember his tears over Jerusalem.

Likewise his disciples. The successes of Pentecost were soon followed by persecution and a scattering of the congregation. There were imprisonments and martyrdoms. It wasn't easy.

Yes, we can expect disappointments. We are not yet in the church triumphant, but laboring in the church militant. We have not yet entered into glory where all will be perfect. So we can expect

discouragements, and reverses. But how can we avoid feeling discouraged? What can give us the positive approach that turns pessimism into optimism, that gives courage in the face of discouragement, and that preserves joy in the “midst of disappointments. We turn to him who is the head of the church. We tune in on his prayer, ‘the prayer of our great High Priest, spoken as he faced the greatest trial in the work his Father had sent him to do. We consider *The High Calling of the Ministry* as seen from Jesus’ prayer in behalf of his disciples and their successors. As we consider this, we shall also let Luther speak to us through his commentary on this prayer of our Savior, about which he says: “Truly, it is a very passionate, hearty prayer, in which he opens up and pours out in full the very depths of his heart, both toward us and his Father” (746).

It was the night on which one disciple would betray and another deny him. He spoke at length with his disciples about the way to the Father, about the Holy Spirit he would send for their comfort, about the world’s hatred, about their grief that would turn into joy. He concludes with the words: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed.” The disciples could hear him. His prayer has been recorded also for our hearing.

As Jesus first prays for himself (1-5), we can see who it is who prays for us.

As Jesus prays for his disciples (6-19), we know this prayer has application also to the pastors he sends out today.

As Jesus prays for all believers (20-26), we are assured that he prays for our congregations and us.

I. Jesus prays for himself:

“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

As we listen to this first part of his prayer we can see who it is that prays for us, and thus who it is that has called us into his service. “Father,” he says, and he can say it in a way different from the way we say it, “glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” He can call himself Son in a way we never can. The time has come to show their unique relationship by the manner in which each glorifies the other. The time has come for the Son to pass through the deepest humiliation to glory. How did this take place? Luther comments:

In no other way than that the Father raised him from death, cast the devil under his feet, and made him King and Lord over all creatures. This is publicly proclaimed through the gospel, so that it is known worldwide. How it happened once on Easter day, thus it must be preached to the ends of the earth and known from generation to generation (753).

Indeed, the Son bids the Father, “Glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” Who else but the eternal Son of the eternal Father, “begotten of the Father before all worlds,” can speak thus?

And the Son will glorify the Father. He tells his Father: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” Luther: “To complete the work the Father gave him to do consists in this that he loaded on himself all disgrace and shame, suffering and death, to honor the Father; and all of it for our sake, that we should be redeemed and have eternal life” (775). And to “glorify the Father,” according to Luther is nothing else than this that, in a world that has turned from the Father to the darkness of shameful idolatry and trusts in man’s own righteousness, men learn to “acknowledge him as God, know who he is, what he has in mind, and where we stand with him. No one acquires this knowledge except through Christ.” As John writes: “No one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (Jn 1:18). “I have brought you glory,” the Son prays.

The divine glory of the Son is also evident when he prays: “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” To this Luther says:

Note how St. John, more than the other evangelists, with these words confirms the article that Christ is true God with the Father. For these words: “you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life, etc.” do not permit him to be a mere man. For power over everything that lives, and to give eternal life, does not belong to any creature. . . He thus clearly shows that he possesses the one divine essence and power with the Father, although there are two distinct persons (759).

That is the one who prays. Well may we marvel that he should pray for his disciples and for us. And particularly at this time as he is about to pay the supreme sacrifice for sin. What concern he shows for those he leaves in the world, in fact sends into the world to proclaim the redemption his death is about to accomplish. Redemption will be complete, for the whole world of sinners. He will return to the Father. There remains that he and the Father be glorified through the preaching of this redemption. That is where his disciples fit into the picture, as do all Christians and especially also those called into the public ministry. “I pray for them,” Jesus says of his disciples and later continues, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” What a high calling is that which enjoys such attention and concern on the part of the Lord of Glory!

II. The Prayer for His Disciples

This is the longest part of Jesus’ prayer. Praying in the presence of his disciples, Jesus prays for them. While Jesus has the twelve minus the “son of perdition” in mind, we can surely also apply much of what he says to ourselves, whom in these latter days he has called into his service. Jesus prays:

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. MY prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

Instead of commenting on this entire part of Jesus’ prayer verse by verse we shall select portions of it that are especially meaningful for us, impressing on us the high calling of our ministry.

“ . . .those you gave me”

First Jesus wants the disciples to realize who they are. He speaks of them as “those you gave me out of the world. They were yours, you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.” They are among those whom God chose out of the world as his own, the elect of God, and then gave to his Son. Evidence of this is that Jesus revealed the Father to them and they obeyed his word. Something they could never do by their own power and will. What a glorious identity they have as the elect of God given to the Son for safekeeping!

Luther comments by way of application: “All of this is written for our sake, who have and cling to God’s word. It is an excellent, comforting text for all timid and fearful consciences, especially of those who are troubled and attacked by severe temptations about their predestination.” He proceeds:

If now anyone wants to know whether he is one of the elect or what his relationship to God is, let him listen to what Jesus says in this and similar verses. . There is no doubt about it. Those who have been called and have followed the revelation of God, accepting it with utter seriousness, that is, believe and hold it to be truth, they are the ones whom the Father gave to Christ (779).

Recognition of our high calling begins with the identity we have as God's elect. Chosen of God, given to Christ to be his own! This is true not because of our will or effort or choice, as Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44). Luther comments further: "For he [Jesus] wants to show that to cling to Christ and become his disciple is not the result of human will and intent, but of God's power and work." "Therefore don't consider it a trifling matter but a sure and certain comfort when you feel that you have Christ and his Word, and desire with all your heart to remain so that you are in the little band who belong to Christ and will not be lost" (780).

When Luther writes about "feeling that you have Christ, etc." he is not directing us to our subjective feelings for certainty of election. Throughout his presentation he points to what God has done in bringing his elect to faith in Christ's atoning work. This shows that God is following through on his election as we read in Romans: "Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (8:30). The Christian who knows (feels) himself justified by faith in Christ, worked by the Holy Spirit, is to be certain of his election. He believes because he is one of the elect. Romans leads to this conclusion. That is the comfort and assurance also Luther points to, not to a subjective feeling but to God's effective work which has resulted in the obedience of faith.

Elect of God, given to Christ! What a marvelous identity! Truly, he has redeemed me that I should be his own. If we are to appreciate the high calling of the ministry, it is important that we first recognize the high calling of being the elect of God and of belonging to Christ. We can speak of it without pride. Rather with a deep sense of unworthiness and profound gratitude we acknowledge the riches of God's grace in making us what we are: elect saints in Christ.

"I have given them the Word"

Important in all of this is the Word. The high calling of the ministry is above all a ministry of the word. Jesus prays in regard to the word: "For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them." Again later he prays, "I have given them your word."

Some comments of Luther:

All depends on the word, through which we receive and take possession of everything. But it is important to know that whatever Christ speaks is the Father's word. . . For here you hear of no other means except the word which he had given them through oral preaching, yet that very word he calls the Father's word, which he had received from heaven and brought to us. He says it has such power and produces fruit so that they through it may know the Father's will and heart and have all things needful to salvation.

Thus Luther points to the divine origin and the marvelous power and effect of the word.

What is true of the oral word Jesus spoke to the disciples is true of the word we have in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. It is the Father's word; it is the word of Christ; in it not the disciples but God is speaking. What Luther says of the power and effectiveness of the Word which Jesus spoke to the disciples is equally true of the written word given to us, for it is the same word. Through it we know the Father's will toward us and all we need for our salvation. Through it we not only know it but believe it.

What a high calling it is to minister this word to people! How we felt that the first time we stepped into the pulpit! We felt it when we were installed into our first assignment or in subsequent congregations. We can only pray that the sense of wonder and high responsibility and awe at being entrusted with God's Word of power and grace may never leave us. Luther gives us this encouragement for our own Bible study and our preaching: "Therefore we should let nothing discourage us, but hear the word of comfort much and often, chew it thoroughly and put it into practice. For they are such excellent, comforting words, that one may well preach them many years. Yes, their excellence is greater beyond one's ability to preach it"(788).

Certainly we should resist every temptation to turn from that word of comfort. Again Luther: “But remember, to stick to the word and decline all other thoughts, and to wish to hear and know from God only what proclaims Christ.”

What a central place the Word has in our ministry, for our own edification and growth, and for the preaching and teaching and counseling we are called to do! No one can appreciate the high calling of the ministry who does not stand in awe of the Word the Lord has given to us.

“I have sent them”

Important in this part of Jesus’ prayer is what he says about the disciples’ call. Two words sum it up, “sanctified” and “sent.”

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Jesus prays that they may be made ready for their assignment. Sanctify them, set them apart by making them holy. Luther points to the fact that there is much hypocritical holiness in the world. The devil sees to that. He uses all his cunning to introduce teachings that have the most beautiful appearance and reputation of truth and holiness but in fact are falsehood and lies. But how can you know what is truth and holiness? Commenting on the words, “your word is truth,” he says: “See, there it stands: If you really want to know what genuine holiness is in order to distinguish it from all others, look only to the word and don’t be deceived by mere appearances. That is the proper touchstone, ‘yes, it is the very thing which alone produces true, genuine holiness’ (819). He elaborates on this:

But by the grace of God we know that genuine holiness is simply this that he gives us the right faith in the word of Christ, and always strengthens and increases it; from it grows a variety of good and righteous fruit and increases daily. All of this is not our doing or within our capacity; it comes from his grace and divine power (821).

Now follows his reference to the disciples’ call. “As you sent me into the word, I have sent them into the world.” Luther connects the sanctifying and sending: “Here you see why he prays that they may be sanctified, namely, because he singles them out and sends them to preach the gospel” (821). By sending them as he does, Luther says that Jesus

confirms the dear Apostles as doctors and preachers, binds us to their lips, whether we are educated or unlearned. Everyone must humble himself, however wise and intelligent he may be, and let himself be taught and instructed by the lowly, simple fishermen, and listen to them as to the Lord Christ himself (821).

The Father had sent the Son and given him his word. Jesus had sent the Apostles with that same word. So Luther concludes: “Therefore we must come and listen to the words of Peter and Paul and whoever has like testimony, and let your heart trust them as firmly as though you heard all the angels of heaven, yes, God with his own voice speak them” (822).

That the Lord called the disciples, that they had a divine call is evident from Jesus’ prayer. We believe ours to be no less divine, even though we did not receive it in the same direct manner as they. Recognizing the difference between their immediate and our mediate calls, we can make some applications to the ministry today. What a high calling it turns out to be!

What we must never forget is that it is the Lord who sends, who calls. We are quite accustomed to speak of our calls as divine. We believe what we are saying. Ours was not a direct call like that of the apostles, but we affirm with Scripture that it still is the Lord who gives pastors and teachers to his church (cf Eph. 4). It is the Holy Ghost who makes us “overseers” (Acts 20:28). Can it really be? It’s hard to grasp the reality of it. But it’s true, for I can hear God’s Son saying, “As my Father sent me, so send I you.” Don’t let the wonder of it wear off! Don’t let disappointments make you doubt. Think of it, and marvel. Say to yourself, “I was called to this ministry, to this parish by the Lord Jesus Christ.” What a high calling that is!

I marvel all the more when I hear that the Lord Jesus calls such who are sanctified. He determines the qualifications and they are high. How can I measure up? Can the holy God use a sinful creature like me? Then I hear him praying, “Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.” I begin to realize that he works the requisite qualifications in me. How important to him is the ministry to which I am called!

“... Into the world”

“Into the world, it that is the way the Lord in this prayer speaks of the field into which he sent the disciples. “I have sent them into the world.” He makes frequent reference to the world in this part of his prayer. Not that he is here praying for the world. He says, “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me.” Yet he has much to say about the world into which he sends his disciples. Jesus’ own relationship to the world is this: the Father sent him into the world (v 18). He is still in the world as he speaks this prayer (v 13). He will not remain in the world any longer (v 11). “I am coming to you,” he says to the Father. While he was in the world, the world hated him because he was not of it. Luther explains why. Jesus says as Luther expounds:

The world, according to its thinking, has a good and valid reason to hate me. For I am not one with the world. I must point out its blindness and misery, rebuke its wisdom and holiness as ineffectual before God. It is not that I wish it harm or injury. I would gladly help snatch the poor, trapped souls from the devil’s jaws and bring them to God. But the devil cannot tolerate that; that is why he raves and rages, incites and embitters hearts against me and my word; that is why the world cannot and does not want to give up its blindness and insolence (815).

Thus the world, enslaved to satan, rewards him whom the Father’s love sent into the world for the sinners’ redemption.

But Jesus’ gracious heart continues to reach out to the world that has treated him so shamefully. Though he himself leaves the world and returns to the Father with his redemptive mission accomplished, he has a mission for those whom the Father has given him. He speaks of their relationship to the world, what they are to do, what they can expect, what he will do for them.

“not of the world”

Although Jesus is leaving the world, that is, removing his visible, physical presence, the same is not true of his disciples. “But they are still in the world,” he tells his Father. In fact, “my prayer is not that you take them out of the world.” He does not ask for that even though he has to say, and he says it twice, “they are not of the world” even as he was not of it. The disciples would have to say as every Christian sings, “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home.” We note that Jesus is not asking the Father that they may not be of the world. He is not admonishing the disciples not to be of the world. He simply asserts: “They are not of the world.” That’s the way it is for them, and we can add, for all Christians. Their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20).

Not being of the world, the disciples can expect to experience the world’s hatred, even as Jesus had. Luther describes this:

If you are a disciple of the Lord Christ and love his word, you will have to be content that you must have the world as enemy. You will find that not only strangers and scoundrels but also your closest and best friends, honest and honorable people in the eyes of the world, will be averse and hostile, attack and slander you, all for no other reason than that you have, preach, and confess the Word of Christ. There is no greater sin, nothing brings greater disgrace than being a Christian. The world hates no vice more bitterly. The world can tolerate and forgive all kinds of stupidity. It has room for all kinds of rogues and can endure and feel sorry for them. But the dear Christians the earth cannot bear. Whoever persecutes, condemns and devours them is most virtuous and renders God and the world the highest service (813f).

Is Luther exaggerating? He calls to mind Jesus’ word: “They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (Jn 16:2).

If that is what the Christians, what the disciples could expect in the world, why didn’t, why doesn’t Jesus take them with himself to the Father? Why leave them in a strange and hostile world? The reason is that Jesus wants to accomplish more through them. They are to enlarge his kingdom; they are to add to his little flock. They have his word. He cannot remain in the world any longer. They are to gather many more who through their word will believe in him. So he asks the Father not to remove them even though the world would be glad to be rid of them and they in turn are sick and tired of the world.

Luther explains:

That is why Christians and especially preachers should want to live, and we together with Christ should pray for their long life. There is so much ingratitude and contempt besides heinous slander and persecution of God's word that a God-fearing preacher finally wearies of preaching. The greatest favor God could show us is to take us away very soon so we need not see and hear such evils. But what shall we do? There yet remains some small congregation which daily is exposed to all kinds of danger and could be destroyed. So we must care for it, work, and not stop as long as we live (816).

“...Protect them”

So the Lord leaves his disciples in the world. They have work to do. He knows the trials, dangers, and disappointments they will encounter and he prays for them: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.” Again: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.” The disciples heard Jesus' prayer and knew themselves to be under his care and keeping. What surer protection could they have! The greatest danger they would face was false doctrine. Against this the Father would protect them with his word. Luther writes: “For the devil is too crafty and the offense of false doctrine is too great for us to overcome it with all our own wisdom and power. Christ said that even the elect would scarcely escape being misled into error” (802).

Luther applies Jesus' prayer to himself and to us:

Through this prayer also we poor people are preserved; otherwise no person on earth would be able to hold his ground against so many clever, sly, powerful spirits and sects who have existed from the beginning to this very day. . . Yes, also among us how few there are who have and keep the gospel pure and with its right meaning (802f).

We now ask: Where and how do we as Christians, and then also as pastors, fit into the world? Jesus has told us. We are not of the world even as he is not. This is stated as a fact and not as a hope or potential possibility. Because Christ and the world are such direct opposites we cannot belong to both. Sometimes we'd like to try. And we may feel disappointment when we find that it cannot be done because we are not of the world. But when we think about it, how thankful we should be! What a high and honorable position we have with him who was glorified by the almighty God. We can say without any regrets, “What is the world to me?” How important to remember, we are not of the world!

This, however, is not to be understood in a monastic sense. By saying we are not of the world, the Lord is not saying that we should withdraw from it, have as little as possible to do with it. God will determine the time of our withdrawal. Once freed from the monastery, as a Christian living in the world, Luther could enjoy life. He had a sense of humor. He bought a garden near Wittenberg and a small farm south of Leipzig where he and Katie were going to retire. He enjoyed good food and Katie's beer. He freed Christians from the concept that not being of the world called for a strict, ascetic life.

The fact is that we are in the world and not only to mark time in seclusion, as separate from the world as possible. We are in it and it is ours to use. Above, all we have a mission to the world. It's impossible to exaggerate its importance. It sounds like arrogance to say that the world exists so that we can do our job. But it's a fact. God is still patiently withholding his final judgment for a reason. Peter writes: “Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation “ (2 Pt 3:15). You and I have the commission to proclaim that salvation during the Lord's time of patience. Our Savior determined to give us that assignment, no rather, that privilege and honor.

When we think of the high calling the Lord has given us, we become apprehensive. How can we live up to it? How can we carry it out in a hostile world? How can we avoid being devoured by satan, the roaring lion? We enjoy our Savior's prayer for protection. When we hear his prayer we feel privileged and safe.

Even in a world in which we may be despised, ridiculed, put to shame, and feel intimidated at times, ours is indeed a high calling. Don't doubt it ever!

“...a full measure of my joy within them”

Jesus prays as he does in the hearing of his disciples for their joy. He says to his Father: "I am coming to you now, but I say these things that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

What a description of the joy which the disciples would have! Jesus calls it "my joy," the kind of joy that could come only from him. This in contrast to the joys people seek in the world. They will have joy in "full measure"; it will be total, complete, entire, with nothing lacking. This in contrast to the bittersweet nature of the joys people experience in the world. They will have this joy "within them," in their hearts. This in contrast to the world's joys that center around things, around possessions, around this body and life. Luther compares the two:

For even if you heaped together all the joys of the world, they are no help against temptation and misfortune. For the world's joy depends on uncertain, temporal possessions, honor, and pleasures, and lasts only as long as they are present. It fades and is gone when nothing more than a contrary wind blows and when it is to endure a little hardship. This, however, is the kind of joy that remains forever (even as its source is eternal) and in the midst of external affliction and adversity persists and grows so that one can with a happy heart despise and forget all the joys of the world (812).

When persecution arose in Jerusalem, the apostles experienced this joy in Christ. They were brought before the Sanhedrin, flogged, and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus. We read of them: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41). They found their joy in the gospel. We read: "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ." They had the full measure of Jesus' joy within them.

Let's not forget that our ministry is one of joy, nourished by Jesus' word of salvation. It is the joy of Christmas, of Easter, of Pentecost, of the Reformation. The joy of sharing the gospel. The joy of preparing a soul for a blessed eternity. The joy of baptizing a child. The joy of distributing the Lord's body and blood to reassure sinners of the Lord's grace and forgiveness. The joy of instructing an adult who hears' the gospel for the first time. The joy of preaching a sermon. The joy of counseling a troubled soul. The joy of saying, "Your sins are forgiven." The Lord wants you to have a full measure of his joy within you as you go about your ministry. Don't let the devil, the world, or thoughts that spring from our flesh, rob you of the full measure of joy you have in the high calling of the ministry.

III. Jesus prays for all believers

The final portion of Jesus' prayer has direct application to us, to the preaching we are doing and the congregations that are the result of that preaching. Jesus prays:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Listen to Jesus: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." Luther tells us that "we may write this text in pure golden letters as one that applies specifically to us" (829). In the last verse of the prayer he similarly says: "I have made you (your name) known to them, and will continue to make you known."

"those who will believe"

Isn't it wonderful that Jesus prayed, and still prays, for our congregations and us? The Lord continues to bless the apostles' message as it is preached. The Lord Jesus promises that he continues to make the Father's name known. As you step into your pulpit in Prairietown, Nebraska, or Suburbia, Colorado, the congregation before you is a fulfillment of Jesus' prayer, These are people who believe through the Apostles' message. They are the object of Jesus' prayer. As you preach, Jesus word, "and I will continue to make you known," happens. What you do is part of Jesus' high priestly prayer. Through you he continues to carry out his high priestly function. But we sometimes wonder. We preach, but who listens? The only noticeable response may be an occasional "Good sermon, pastor," as the people leave the church. Sometimes even that is lacking. We preach and it would seem to no avail. We are ready to ask with Isaiah, "Lord, who has believed our message?" (Ro 10:16).

Luther assures us: "We know, that some who hear the word believe and can prove that from many passages and examples of Scripture. . . The fact that some, though they hear the word, do not believe, does not rob the word of anything."

If you ever wonder about the power of the word, listen to Christ, who prays for those who will believe through the apostles' message, and then preach that message and continue to preach it. It will not fail. Believe God. Believe his promises. And when he occasionally leads some one to open his heart to you and tell you how much a certain sermon helped him or her, be grateful for also such visible evidence. But whether you see it or not, believe God's promises and trust that his prayer will not be for naught. What a high calling it is to have a part in fulfilling this prayer of our Lord!

"... that all of them may be one"

What a marvelous unity the preaching which God has called us to do brings about: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." There are those who would use this passage to bring all people together into one grand ecumenical church in which they agree to agree on less and less. External union is the goal though there is no meeting of minds and hearts in what is believed. Preaching divergent doctrines is even hailed as stimulating and enlightening. It broadens one's perspective, it may be said. To make an impact on the world the church must present a united front even it has a fractured-back. What a superficial and erroneous view of Jesus' petition!

How differently Luther speaks of Jesus' prayer "that all of them may be one." Luther says that whoever is brought to faith through the Apostles' word should be assured on the basis of Jesus' prayer that he is one body and forms one cake with all of Christendom. What helps or hurts him as one member, helps or hurts the whole body. "How could anyone wish for anything more blessed than to join this fellowship or brotherhood and to become a member of this body which is called Christendom" (831).

What is more, believers are assured that a close unity also exists between them and their Savior and the Father. Jesus says: ". . . just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may be one in us." We are reminded how Jesus said "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40) and conversely, "whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Mt 25:45). Thus the members of the *una sancta* are united to God in such a way that whatever good or bad is done to the church or one of its members, it is done to God. Luther sums this thought up in this way: "You cannot despise, abuse, and persecute a Christian, or honor and benefit him, but that you do it to God himself."

How does this glorious unity that Jesus describes come about? Not through man's works. These only cause divisions and sects. God's word unites through a common faith into one body.

We are called to serve with that word. Sometimes it appears as though faithfulness to that word is divisive. Sometimes we lose members or prospects because they think we are too restrictive. Sometimes our fellowship practices are viewed as disruptive of unity. Not so. The true word unites believers in the *una sancta*. The true word produces confessions that reveal unity of faith where it truly exists. The true word exposes divisive doctrines of men.

The Lord's call pledges us to that work, completely. What a high privilege it is that God should entrust us with the means by which he unites us with himself and with one another into such a close fellowship, the *una sancta*.

“. . . to see my glory”

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.” Luther calls this “the last, but the most comforting part of this prayer for all who cling to Christ” (839).

Why? This prayer causes us “to be sure and certain about our final hope and where we will remain and find rest, for here in the world we are wretched and rejected and have no sure, abiding city” (837).

“Where may this be? What is the name of the place?” Luther asks. “Where I am,” Jesus says. Luther describes that as “the Father’s arms and bosom, where all the angels come, lifting and carrying us.” He describes this verse as the “pillow and bed of down for our soul, on which it can lie with joyful heart as it departs.” He speaks of that “dear hour” (*liebe Stundlein*) when we, removed and freed from the sin and misfortune of the world and the devil’s power, will be brought to eternal rest and joy. But how can one describe the glory we will see in the presence of Jesus? Luther reminds us how dimly we see now, like looking at the brilliant sun through a thick cloud. Now we know only by faith.” There, however, another light will shine. No longer will we only believe and preach and describe with words. We will see his glory most clearly present before our eyes and look upon it with unspeakable eternal joys.”

But to be with Christ, to see his glory—is that what people really want? Isn’t that just “pie in the sky?” The important questions are these: “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? ‘What shall we wear?’” Don’t also our members often appear more concerned about the house they own, paying off the mortgage, maintaining it in style than in the mansion the Lord has prepared for them in heaven? Don’t they often show a greater interest in setting a good table at which to dine than in the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb? A materialistic world can warp the sense of values in our members and in us.

To be with Christ, to see his glory—this must have top priority. Jesus says: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Mt 16:26). Jesus reminds us: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” “To see his glory” is the final blessing he asks of the Father for those that are his. That is the goal for which he went the way of humiliation to glory.

To be with Christ, to see his glory—that is the ultimate goal of our ministry, the ministry to which the Lord has called us. By saying that, we are not forgetting the many blessings for this life which daily are ours. We are not forgetting the varying needs of this life to which we must minister. But somehow it all comes together and reaches its ultimate goal when we pass through death into eternity—to be with Christ. It may look remote, but “in the midst of earthly life, snares of death surround us,” as Luther taught us to sing. So our flocks and we must be ready, always. We generally count success in our ministry by the number of people we have in church, by the number we can add to our membership rolls, and that is important, but only in so far as it will add to the number who will find Jesus’ prayer that they may see his glory fulfilled for them in eternity.

The importance of what anyone does, of his vocation, is recognized by the benefits derived from it, especially in a time of crisis. A physician or surgeon is important to us when we are sick. We look to him to ease our pain, to speed our recovery. When a thief breaks into our house, we appreciate the police officer; when our house is on fire, the fireman; when we have a plugged drain, the plumber. The severity of the crisis may determine how important their service was to us. When the crisis is over or no longer recognized, we forget about them.

No crisis is as critical and persistent as the fact of sin, death, Judgment, eternity. Daily it confronts us and daily it must be faced. Unfortunately, the world in general and even our members may brush it aside and ignore it. But our Savior doesn’t. And we shouldn’t. Remember his prayer. Remember the assignment he has given to those he sends into the world. Remember the assignment he has given to you. All of this compels us gratefully to turn to our Savior in prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for your prayer in which you assure us that you continue to send us forth with your word so that ever more souls may be brought to faith and eternal glory. Keep us ever mindful of the privilege to serve you in THE HIGH CALLING OF THE MINISTRY. Help us

against Satan and the world that we may with courage and joy carry out your mission until you call us out of this world to be with you in glory.

THE HIGH CALLING OF THE MINISTRY

Points for discussion

1. Should the Seminary do more to prepare students for disappointments experienced in the ministry?
2. How can the doctrine of election be a comfort to us? How can we know that we are one of the elect?
3. Discuss the central place of the Word in our ministry, including counseling, personal visits, etc.
4. To what extent do we let “human” procedures in a “call” raise questions about its divinity?
5. What does it mean that we are not of the world? How will this show itself?
6. What are the most serious dangers to our ministry against which we need the Lord’s protection?
7. Discuss problems and disappointments of the ministry versus its joys.
8. Discuss visible evidence of the effectiveness of God’s Word versus simply believing its effective power.
9. To what extent is our position on sound doctrine and our position on fellowship a hindrance in our mission work?
10. Discuss striking a balance between concern for present problems of our members versus concern for their eternal welfare.