

**So, You're a Pastor, a Lutheran Pastor,
Serving Where the Lord of the Church Has Placed You:
And I Thank God For You in My Prayers**

"What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone ... How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? ... I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."¹

Our present time and place knows not what the human is. Neither psychologists, nor sociologists nor anthropologists will define the human, although they have so much to say about the human condition. We've had at least one theological anthropology conference in our circles already. And I daresay that the more AI becomes part of our world, the more we'll think along with those who are trying to develop artificial intelligence as it seeks to mimic human intelligence, which, of course, *makes us need to know what it is that the human is.* They don't know. And they won't, apart from the revelation of the LORD God, especially in Incarnate Word given for us sinners. You do know, by the grace of God.

And you know what the human is because, by the grace of God, you know—with certainty—the Deity. And you know that you didn't climb into the throne room of God to find such knowledge as theologians of glory are up to, but that God revealed His saving face in the crucified face of a naked Jew. You theologians of the cross found the Hidden God in the face of Christ, or rather, were found by the Holy Spirit as that gospel promise in the crucified Christ that winged its way into your heart through the lips of another human and was washed all over your head by your childhood pastor and Whose Really Present body and blood have been given to you by the hands of another Called servant of Word and Sacrament.

Not only do you know what a human is, you know the Deity. And you know the mechanism, the means, by which Deity and fallen humanity are one again. And that is what you're Called by the Lord of the Church to be doing—delivering the goods of Christ and His promises via Word and Sacrament.

I am here to serve a room full of pastors—Lutheran pastors—who deeply appreciate what Pastor Luther was saying. On our good days and our bad days, we, poor stinking bags of maggots that we are, realize that we teach and preach and serve God's Word; otherwise we do “nothing.” And while you sleep or sip wine with your bride or drink beer with your circuit brothers the Word weakens the power of the instead-of-Christ teachings and preachings out there. You know that you “do nothing” and that the Word does everything. In your *justus* moments, you personally trust, gloriously—in a theologian of the cross kind of way—that's enough. In your *peccator* moments, it feels like *nothing*.

AC V asserts that the Holy Spirit is given through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments. And it condemns “others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings

¹ Martin Luther, Second Invocavit Sermon, (1522), LW 51:71

without the external Word through their own preparations and works”² (AC V, 3 & 4). The Word—not your Word, but God’s--does everything *so that they may obtain this faith—namely, faith that is reckoned by God as righteousness*--and we Lutheran pastors, along with folks we serve in our congregations that are Lutheran, believe it, teach it and confess it.

Yet Luther, learning from St. Paul, could vociferously defend the servant of the gospel when the office of the public ministry of the gospel was under attack. There, he would speak highly of “*my ministry.*”

But what does Paul intend by this bragging? I reply: This doctrine has as its purpose that every minister of the Word of God should be sure of his calling. In the sight of both God and man he should boldly glory that he preaches the gospel as one who has been called and sent. Thus the king’s emissary boasts and glories that he does not come as a private person but as the emissary of the king. Because of this dignity as the king’s emissary he is honored and given the position of highest honor, which he would never receive if he were to come as a private person. Therefore, let the preacher of the Gospel be sure that his calling is from God. It is perfectly proper that he should follow Paul’s example and exalt this calling of his, so that he may gain credence and authority among the people. In the same way the king’s emissary elevates his office and calling. To glory this way is not vain but necessary; for he does not glory in himself but in the king who has sent him and whose authority he seeks to have honored and elevated.³

You, dear faithful Lutheran pastor, personally and ministerially, matter. And so it is faithful and good to say that I thank God for you in my prayers. And it is faithful and good to encourage, well, *you* in your God-given task.

I pray that this piece of work done by a poor maggot sack encourages you and compels you, dear pastors; that is, you dear Lutheran pastors. And I do so as a Called emissary of the King of the kingdom.

Today we’ll use as a framework a couple documents that I work with all the time and that you are familiar with, that is, the diploma of vocation that you received from the congregation through which the Lord of the Church Called you. And the rite of ordination/installation from CW21. We’ll put ourselves, as it were, into the installation service on a Sunday afternoon, of a new pastor in a particular congregation in a particular town on a particular day.

Baseline on the LORD God Hidden/Revealed, Love, Ministry/Leadership and Other Assumptions

The rite begins: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said to his church: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

“Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”

² AC V, 3 & 4

³ LW 26:16

We assume an awful lot here—that the folks in the assembly actually know who Jesus authentically is and not just what they have advised Him to be or what they simply have extrapolated from their earliest of Sunday School days. Professor Deutschlander so often deplored the dumbing down of faithful proclamation prevalent already a generation ago; he'd say, "Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. And that's all I want to know." He was not speaking against children nor against child-like trust in the Lord's Christ; he was speaking against intellectual laziness on the part of the Church and I would suggest he was helping all of us realize how far and wide and long and high is the love of God found in Christ; there's enough *there* to silence and to humble the best of the best and the brightest of the bright. You Lutheran pastors are capable of digging far deeper into the depth of the Hebrew Scriptures' use of דְבָר /word as background for the New Testament's use of λόγος/word and all of it climaxing in the jarring assertion of Jesus as the Enfleshed λόγος.⁴ No, you shouldn't feel the need to explain all of this every time you run across "word" in the Scriptures, but as you take the opportunity, you can pull back the curtain just a bit on the mystery of God in Christ. And marvel with God's people. That's the Jesus of Whom we are speaking in the pastor/congregation relationship.

And how many of those in the assembly for a new pastor's installation on a Sunday afternoon (usually that's the custom in our part of the kingdom) think about the authentic development & history of the use of the tetragrammaton—the Name/Ha Shem/G_d—and the purported claim of those who listened to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and call him LORD/Lord/κύριος/kurios.

You pastors learned to work in the Hebrew of the Old Testament already as an undergrad. You experienced what all the pastors in our synod and what any Hebrew student had learned—there is a very special name for God, the LORD, that Moses used--The Tetragrammaton, (literally, the four-letter name). So special is this name that it has a *Kethibh* (a written presentation-- יהוה) and it has a spoken one (*Qere*). Hebrew students have to come to grips with this name and this LORD God.

So mysterious and majestic is the name (and we're not even yet really talking about the Hidden One that the Name reveals...) that Prof. Brug says, "We do not know with certainty how this name is to be pronounced." And it could be translated, "I AM," or "I will continue to be what I was," Brug says.⁵ *We cannot overstate the majesty and mystery of the LORD's name*—and, of course, of the LORD Himself.

Moses went as the LORD had sent him and led the people out of Egypt. He was now on Mt. Sinai. Moses, overestimating his chumminess with the LORD, or perhaps desperate for assurance, wanted to see God.⁶ "And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

⁴ Kleinknecht, Kittel, TDNT, IV:77-136

⁵ John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004) pp. 297-298

⁶Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*.(New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2004) Alter's footnote on Exodus 33:18: *Show me, pray, your glory*. We are not likely to recover precisely what the key term *kavod*—glory, honor, divine presence, and very literally, "weightiness"—conveyed to the ancient Hebrew imagination. In any case, Moses, who first fearfully encountered God in the fire in the bush, is now ready and eager to be granted a full-scale epiphany, a frontal revelation of the look and character of this divinity that had been speaking to him from within the pillar of cloud.

“Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen” (Ex 33:21-23).

Neither Moses, nor any other human could see the face of God and live. So God, in His grace, reveals to Moses what the LORD wanted him to see, his “back” his אַחֲרָי, his τὰ ὀπίσω μου (LXX), posteriora mea (Vulgate), his *bintennach* (Luther), his hinder parts.⁷ Sainted Professor Arnold Koelpin, not normally known for earthy speech--unless he was talking Luther talk--said it differently.

This is far from the cuddly bear picture of God and Moses the children’s story Bibles portray. This holy God consumes the fallen humans. This God has to hide Himself from the humans for their own good. This God destroys both soul and body of the human sinner in hell. He speaks and it thunders. Limits have to be set up for the protection of the people, “lest the LORD break out against them.”⁸ This God is to be feared. To think one can keep His law is the height of hubris.

This big God is the One who had chosen to speak it all into existence. So mysterious and so majestic. He could have done anything. And He *speaks*, “Let there be,” and it is. And it is good. Remember that He had chosen to create, hands on, the crown of His creation. He walked with them in the cool of the day, talking to them, male and female, both created in the image of Him. There was no need to hide from the humans for their good before their rebellion against their Creator.

But when the man and the woman chose to be god and reject their Creator, this LORD God who had spoken it all into existence chose to speak powerfully again. In a *promise*. A promise of a seed of the woman that would strike the head of the Serpent; The Seed would win, the God who now hides and yet *speaks* to save the sinners said/says.

For so much of the subsequent history of the LORD’s dealings with His people, generation after generation, they proved they loved the other gods around. Since they couldn’t see the LORD, since all they had was His afterglow/His hinder parts/His promises, it seems they cared more about the gods they could see and sense and perceive and perform for or manipulate down to size.

We jump ahead to the mid eighth century B.C., to Isaiah 45. In the context of speaking of the LORD’s use of Cyrus, the Persian, as a christ (an anointed one), and in the context of the God of Israel sounding like the one who dressed down Job and told him to brace himself like a man so that he would listen: Isaiah writes: “Truly you are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel and Savior!”

⁷ Alter’s note on Ex 33:23: *you will see My back, but My face will not be seen*. Volumes of theology have been spun out of these enigmatic words. Imagining the deity in frankly physical terms was entirely natural for the ancient monotheists: this God had, or at least could assume, a concrete manifestation which had front and rear, face and back, and that face man was forbidden to see. But such concreteness does not imply conceptual naivete’. Through it the Hebrew writer suggests an idea that makes good sense from later theological perspectives: that God’s intrinsic nature is inaccessible, and perhaps also intolerable, to the finite mind of man, but that something of His attributes—His “goodness,” the directional pitch of His ethical intentions, the afterglow of the effulgence of His presence—can be glimpsed by humankind.

⁸ Exodus 19:24

מוֹשִׁיעַ: יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי מִסְתַּתֵּר אֵל אֶתָּה אֱלֹהִים

August Pieper, who served in our seminary a century ago, writes in his classic commentary on v. 15:

The predicate of the sentence lies in *mistatter*—you are a God who keeps Himself hidden. The translation should express the characteristic of the Hithpael participle, the uninterrupted continuation of the action. . . . Not only now and then does God hide Himself; but always, without interruption, absolutely, does He keep Himself hidden from the reason and senses of natural man, both as to His being and as to His sovereignty. *Though not even we preachers are always fully aware of this characteristic of God's being, yet it is clearly set forth in Scripture: Exodus 33:18ff; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12; Isaiah 40:12ff; Romans 11:33ff; Job 38ff; 1 Corinthians 2, etc. etc* (italics mine—pch). No perception by the senses or the intellect, no conclusions based on axioms of human reasoning, no scientific experiment and discovery, no natural philosophy or metaphysical reasoning will ever discover God. He has hidden Himself absolutely from the wise men of the world.⁹

God always, without interruption, absolutely hides Himself. Even when He reveals Himself—this is also the point of the Incarnation later in history—He hides Himself. This is oh! so important to remember as men under God and, especially, as preachers¹⁰ (according to Professor Pieper!), under God and in Christ.

Let's note also that the commentators say that so high and so holy is not only the LORD, but also His Name, that the Tetragrammaton wasn't spoken for centuries, perhaps beginning with the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. The special name of the LORD, that mysterious and majestic name that reveals the mysterious and majestic and merciful God, was spoken only once a year by the high priest on the Great Day of Atonement. The God who hides Himself, the God of majesty and mystery and mercy, seems to have become even more hidden for years.

Let's jump ahead another seven centuries after Isaiah to the first century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. Please think about your life as a son of Abraham, a Hebrew, in that first century. You are literate; many aren't. You are literate because your people think very highly of words, for the Hebrew words of God read aloud in both temple and now, synagogue, are recognized as holy. You are also seen as strange because nowhere is there an image of your god—the god of the Hebrews. Your God hides.

But now there are more of your people living in Alexandria than in Jerusalem, which means that there are many Jews who speak and write Greek—enough that a translation into the Greek language needed to be made for God's covenant people. You had heard the story of the exodus, year after year, at the Passover festival. And, if you heard the story in Greek-speaking Alexandria, you heard this:

⁹ August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979) pp. 280-281

¹⁰ Professor Arnold Koelpin, in a Summer Quarter class about a decade and a half ago, told of a discussion re retaining the wording in the catechism on the Lord's Supper: “in, with, and under.” He suggested that other parts of Christendom speak of “in” and “with,” but that the Lutherans need to retain the “under,” for that is where the doctrine of God Hidden (and then Revealed) is explicitly stated in the Small Catechism.

13καὶ εἶπεν Μωυσῆς πρὸς τὸν θεόν Ἴδού ἐγὼ ἐλεύσομαι πρὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐρωτήσουσίν με τί ὄνομα αὐτῶ; τί ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς;

14καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν· καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

15καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν πρὸς Μωυσῆν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν ὄνομα αἰώνιον καὶ μνημόσυνον γενεῶν γενεαῖς. (Ex 3:13-15, LXX)

¹³ But Moses said to God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I say to them?”

¹⁴ So God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He also said, “You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”

¹⁵ God also told Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.’”¹¹

Let’s note a couple things: 1) How the Septuagint attempted to translate 3:14-- Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (I AM WHO I AM); and 2) How the tetragrammaton was translated into the *lingua franca*, Greek-- Κύριος (kurios/Lord).

You Lutheran pastors care more about words than most folks around you. You are aware of many of the difficult issues in translating text to another language. Note today the massive issues involved in translating *The Name* that shall not be named—The Tetragrammaton. How would it feel for your Hebrew-speaking grandpa who had been raised with not saying *The Name*, and now you, a Greek-speaking, (or, at least a Greek-reading) son of Abraham in the First Century Mediterranean Basin, come to the story—the great salvation story of the Exodus—and there actually a name--The Name--is used, er, kind of. It was hard enough to be a son of the covenant without having to come to grips with such a thorny issue. You were raised to memorize and say the great *Shema*: *שמעו יהוה יהוה אחד* (Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God. The LORD is One.) You were marked as different because you were not only monotheistic, but there were no statues and no images of your deity to be seen anywhere. *All you had was a word*, words from your deity who hid Himself. All you had were *the temple practices* in far-off Jerusalem, if you were able to get there, to see no image, but to see and hear and smell and taste the foretastes of the promise of the God who hides Himself.

And then along comes an image (cf. Co 1:15), of flesh and blood, just like we are, except there was something different.

⁹ The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.

¹¹ Ex 3:13-15

¹⁴The Word became flesh and dwelled (*tabernacled*) among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵John testified about him. He cried out, “This was the one I spoke about when I said, “The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.”” ¹⁶For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, (some texts say *only-begotten God*) who is close to the Father’s side, has made him known.¹²

You, dear son of Abraham living in the Mediterranean basin in the first century, would have had to think long and hard about the assertions that are being cast about regarding this Jesus. Plenty of your running mates would have rejected him; your natural inclination would be to fight against him at the core of his claims. The world was made through him, John said, but the cosmos did not know him (hidden as he was). But to those who believed in His Name (!), he gave the right to be the children of God—no less. And that birthright was a matter of new birth, not of anything else; *certainly not the free will of the humans*. This Jesus tented among us, just like the LORD had tented among His people before there was a temple structure. No one had ever seen God or has seen God who hides Himself always, without interruption, absolutely. But something has happened, John wrote. *Someone who always, without interruption, and absolutely hides came out of hiding* to be seen and heard, kind of—and for a purpose—that by *believing*, you may have life in His Name.

Eight chapters on in John’s Gospel, Professor Joel Gerlach comments,

When Jesus declared, ‘Before Abraham was...I am’ (8:58), he intended to identify himself with the God who had revealed himself with the special, unique name (Yahweh/the Tetragrammaton) to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14). The people reacted to Jesus’ claim by picking up ‘stones to stone him’ for blasphemy. But Jesus was then and is now the eternal “I AM.” He is God. He is personal (not just a vague impersonal force in the universe). He is real.”¹³

At the end of his Gospel, John told us the purpose for it—“that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”—immediately after he had just written the story of Thomas rejecting the news from the others about Jesus--“We have seen the Lord/τὸν κύριον.” A week later, Jesus again appears behind locked doors, speaks peace that the world cannot understand into the room and into the hearts/lives of those there and then addressed the skeptic: “Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.”

²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.)

John records that Thomas used the Greek word (κύριός) that was used to translate The Tetragrammaton. Dear 1st century son of Abraham, living in the Mediterranean basin, you have just had God come out of hiding in your presence. Jesus was just declared to be κύριός/ יהוה/Lord. The

¹² John 1:9-18

¹³ Joel Gerlach, *God’s Master Plan: New Testament: An Introduction and Survey* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) p. 43

God who damns both soul and body in hell has just been revealed to you as the One—the One who *saves*. Where is that revelation? In the *Person* of Jesus, the *crucified* and now risen One, the only Name under heaven given among mankind whereby we must be saved.

So, it's one thing to point out the uniqueness of The Name in world history and remark about its mystery and majesty. It's another thing for you pastors to make the central claim of the Christian Church that Jesus is the culmination of Judaism, and, in fact, to claim that Jesus actually equates Himself to the LORD God whose Name was not even to be named, much less was it heard (except for once a year) in His day; and going far past even simply vocalizing the Name, Jesus claimed to *be That One and accepted worship*. *God Hidden and Revealed in Jesus Christ*.

Do we think that most of our people are actually meditating on this on this Sunday afternoon when their new pastor is being installed or every time they hear “Lord,” the translation of κύριός, in the New Testament? Does the God who is too awesome to allow Moses to see Him come to mind? To make the claim that Jesus is *kurios*/Lord meant that you needed to be excluded from the Jewish synagogue and the Roman imperial cults for both the God of the Hebrews and the Roman emperor, before Jesus, claimed to be κύριός. It was big for Jesus to be called, “Lord/*kurios*.” It was much more than calling him the equivalent of what a Mexican means when he says, “*Señor*,” or when a German says, “*Herr*,” or when an American says, “Sir.”

It meant that they were speaking of the LORD present at creation and of the LORD present at the burning bush Who told Moses to announce to the children of Abraham in Egypt that I AM was telling Moses to tell Pharaoh to liberate the Israelites.

This is a mouthful to assert in the name of God. This is a mindful for anyone to digest. This is so much more than some of the hopes of the congregation members who just want a cool guy pastor who won't embarrass their teenagers at church.

This is the One in Whose Name the rite of installation begins. It's the naked humiliated Jew crucified to shame both him and His people Who did not think equality with God was something to be grasped, so He put on flesh and was willing to be equated with the Name-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named God, I AM, and who we believe, teach and confess is the Ultimate and holds “all authority in heaven and on earth.”¹⁴ And as the Ultimate Authority, He commissions His people. This is not the captain of a club; this is G_d in the flesh, the One on the throne.

And He gives His Church the Great Commission that finds its way to the very start of the installation service of the new pastor in the new congregation in which he is about to serve. It's at least worth noting that the so-called Great Commission is used here in the public ministry of the gospel context. And while it certainly includes mission work specifically, and maybe surprisingly, this Great Commission section is properly dropped up front in the installation of a pastor—one who is tasked with gospel ministry.

In His Great love...

What love has to do with a pastor serving a congregation might not be readily apparent to plenty of the folks on the outside. Most think that the church and its leader/pastor should be about community, about making the world a better place, about being nice to people, OK. But love? And the connection between love and “establishing gospel ministry”? It means that we in this assembly

¹⁴ Mt 28:19

on this day *know something profound* and relatively unrecognized; The fallenness of the humans is so obvious for all to see, yes. But the only honest way to see the human condition's suffering, pain, and mortality—is because of their sinfulness, the chief symptom of which is having anyone and/or anything other than the LORD God as their deity.

Love, love, love. Here we assert the love of God (for the fallen humans, of whom I am the worst/first). Again, who knows what “love” is? I think it's wonderful because I'll bet there are some in the assembly who aren't insiders. Let them hear about the God Who is Other than the one of the *opinio legis*.

God loved the world so much that the Incarnation occurred. The Enfleshed God didn't tent among us to condemn the world, but to save it because it needed saving. Whoever trusts in Him is not condemned and the one who un-trusts is condemned because he has not trusted in the name of the unique Son of God.¹⁵ The humans will get the LORD God as God one way or the other—either in grace or in judgment. And Jesus, the Crucified God, commissioned His Church to forgive the sins of sinners and to retain the sins of the theologians of glory.¹⁶ Love—the love of God for the sinful humans—has everything to do with the installation of our new pastor.

“(A) benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Eph 5:31-32). And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage—indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage—it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is the bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, shall he not take all that is hers?...

Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious bride, “without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word” (cf. Eph 5:26-27) of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hos 2 says.

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all

¹⁵ Jn 3:16-17

¹⁶ Jn 20:23

mine is his,” as the bride in the Song of Solomon (2:16) says, “My beloved is mine and I am his.” This is what Paul means when he says in 1 Co 15:57, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” that is, the victory over sin and death, as he also says there, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Co 15:56).¹⁷

It is a beautiful love story at the bottom of the rite of installation. Christopher Mitchell, in his commentary on the Song of Songs, observes:

“My beloved is mine; and I am his,” the beloved says in the Song. This is a beautiful and faithful reflection of Genesis 2:24 where marriage is portrayed as “the closest of all relations of love.” God in his grace desires his estranged creatures to be reunited with him in closest communion. Marriage may be the best earthly, human model of this communion. The analogy of marriage may be universally understood by all people because it is taken from the order of creation. God has also seen fit to endow marriage with some of the most intense pleasures known to human beings. Therefore it is a powerful vehicle for communicating the Gospel of God’s love in Christ, and it invites the hearer or reader of the Song to desire this love.¹⁸

Love—the love of God for the repulsively filthy dirty sinful humans--has everything to do with Lutheran pastoral ministry. For we have no promise that the Holy Spirit is given to humans in any other way than in Jesus as the λόγος proclamation, in water/Word, and in wafer/wine Word. We have no promise from God that people know that love of God in Christ without being touched by someone serving them with Christ in Word & Sacrament. All they really know is that they don’t know—they have no certainty—of anything, much less of the love of God, the Creator of them, the creature. And they’re left with doing it by guess and by golly, trying to read the signs of the times and attempting to see things the way they are. But never knowing.

Our Risen and Ascended Lord

The resurrection of the man, Jesus, is the lynch pin. Again, for the people. “Because of our sins” He had been put to death. “Because of our justification” He was raised and Lutherans are clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not merely a potential or possibility gospel like so many proclaim¹⁹. It is proclamation talk of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as it pertains to the dead humans who will rise again. The Lutheran resurrection preaching is pure delivery of the goods; it is proclaiming the task accomplished for the sinner. Justified in Christ, “I declare to you.” Easter Sunday sounds so different in the Lutheran assembly. It’s because accomplishment is different than possibility.

When it was time to Call a replacement of Judas as the 12th apostle, it was important that the new man had been with Jesus for His entire earthly ministry from start to accomplishment, for he was to “become a witness with us of His resurrection.”²⁰

The ascension of the embodied Christ asserts He still rules His kingdom, eschatologically, yes. But also He rules all things, including the embodied people in the real world now in time. And so we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” And we teach that God’s kingdom comes by itself even without our prayer, but we pray that His kingdom may also come to us. How? It comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now

¹⁷ LW 31:351-352

¹⁸ Christopher Mitchell, (St. Louis, CPH), Song of Songs, p. 42

¹⁹ Cf. Rom 4:25 in the Greek

²⁰ Acts 1:22

on earth and forever in heaven.²¹ The ascended Lord rules as the King of the kingdom. There is so much silliness in kingdom talk out there, reflecting their theologies of glory and being sure of seeing the kingdom at work. Especially when it comes to thinking and talking about the Church, we know that it is all of faith and not of sight, and that the Church is as hidden under the cross as the highest revelation at the cross of Christ was also deep hiddenness.

But here's wonderful kingdom talk—that the baptized are, in the name of God, baptized into Christ's death and burial and are as dead as Jesus was. And as alive as Jesus is, so alive is the baptized. This is The Rock upon which to build a new life free from addiction, free from the old gods, free from the past patterns. And alive to God in Christ. No mere symbolic death and life here. Just promises from God to set the sinner free for life in trust under God and for a life of love next to neighbors.

“In His great love, our risen and ascended Lord has established the gospel ministry”

We humbly recognize in the rite that it is not just “pastoral ministry” that is mentioned here. But of course in the rite that's what we are all recognizing. This is a nice quiet little hint for the world to hear that we in this WELS congregation are not confused about “ministry.” There is one public gospel ministry and multiple forms of it—that's the terminology that we are comfortable using. According to the Divine economy, there has to be a minister/servant and there have to be those who are ministered/served. That's two ends of a relationship involving real human beings in a real place.

And there has to be “the gospel ministry” that the risen and ascended Lord Jesus established, and it needs to be brought to bear between the minister/servant and the one who is served in order for the God/mankind relationship to be established in His gospel righteousness. That “gospel ministry” is the subject of AC V, so solidly laid out for us in our first paper. It's not the human who saves—either on the doing of the ministry end or on the receiving end of the doing of the ministry; it's the dynamite means that the Lord commissions one of His people via a Call to bring to bear that does the doing.

It is not merely an abstract concept or fascinating idea—which, of course, it is. I think we do well to meditate a bit on it as pastors—this thing you are Called by the Lord of the Church to be *doing*—“so that they may obtain *this* faith”²²—namely faith that justifies *coram Deo*. “Why did our LORD choose to do it this way?” I often wonder. We are so weak. So curved in on ourselves. So insecure. So proud in our accomplishments. So selfish. So human. So enslaved. Each and every member of the Body of Christ. Each and every public minister of the Gospel. Each and every pastor. So much possibility of so much clay-ness working its way to the surface of any circumstance and so much possibility for the clay to crack.

“So that the all-surpassing power be of God and not of us.”²³ *Jesus is the Priceless Treasure* for the impoverished sinners and He promises to show up where the gospel is actually proclaimed and where the sacraments are gospelishly administered; we are (merely) stewards of such mysteries of God.²⁴

²¹ Small Cat, 2nd petition, Kolb/Wengert, p.356-357

²² AC V, Kolb/Wengert, p. 41

²³ 2 Co 4:7

²⁴ 1 Co 4:1-2

Today, in the rite of installation of a pastor, what we're up to is simple and clear and usually not controversial in the sense that every religious group has to have its one up in front—*pastoral* ministry. Even we individual Americans, even in the age of expressive individualism, are used to the idea of someone up in front; we count on it, in fact, so that we can bring all of our complaints to that one. So many of us seem comfortable with the idea of the congregation's *boss* having now arrived (at the occasion of the rite of installation); but what I pray always occurs in the assembly on an installation day is that we marvel at the grace of God that He pays attention to the sinners, that He weds them in Christ, and that He commissions our community to be up to something that matters—*ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*—Word and Sacrament gospel ministry done by humans in the name of God to humans who need such ministry.

Has established the gospel ministry

It can't not be there. For the body of Christ to be Christ's, she needs to hear from Her Bridegroom. And she does--through the Word (and Sacraments) that are served by ministers.

For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry, and is present in the ministry [that God will preach and work through men and those who have been chosen by men].

¹³And it is of advantage, so far as can be done, to adorn the ministry of the Word with every kind of praise against fanatical men, who dream that the Holy Ghost is given not through the Word, but because of certain preparations of their own, if they sit unoccupied and silent in obscure places, waiting for illumination, as the Enthusiasts formerly taught, and the Anabaptists now teach.²⁵

We say it to the people we serve all the time—that the natural way for the humans to think of themselves getting along with others is the way of law—*opinio legis*/lawthink. Be a good boy and get a treat. Be a bad boy and have a treat withheld. Even in the age of expressive individualism, it is still the incessant need for others to think and say, “Good boy” “Good girl” in statements and actions of affirmation and validation. *Opinio legis* changes clothes as quickly as fashions shift, but it's still lawthink. It's lawthink in the secular world. It's lawthink in the philosophical world. And especially in the religious world. *Facere quod in se est*²⁶ isn't quite full-blown Pelagianism, but Luther's spot-on when he lumps all the legalisms having to do with God together—papists, Turks, enthusiasts:

You have often heard from us that it is a rule and principle in the Scriptures, and one that must be scrupulously observed, to refrain from speculation about the majesty of God, which is too much for the human body, and especially for the human mind, to bear. “Man shall not see Me and live,” says the Scripture (Ex 33:20). The pope, the Turks, the Jews, and all the sectarians pay no attention to this rule. They put Christ the Mediator out of their sight, speak only of God, pray only to Him, and act only in relation to Him.²⁷

Everything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is not gospel. And let's be clear, the *gospel*, according to the economy of God, needs to be *ministered/served* by one to another. It is *not* legal, that is, having to do with the right way, the conforming way, according to the one or the ones who are in charge. All of the other ways of operating within the human condition are all *legal*—at least with

²⁵ Apology, Article XIII, 12-13, Kolb/Wengert, p. 220

²⁶ Do your best theology

²⁷ LW 26:28

someone's idea of legal--if they are not this one liberated and liberating way—the way of the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel way is of The Way, the authentic catholic and authentic *evangelische* ones (Lutherans) say. The faithful believe/trust, teach and confess/proclaim the good news of Jesus the Lord/LORD “for salvation.” AC V has everything to do with *gospel ministry, that is, delivering the goods of Jesus and the promises attached to Him to human beings who need such goods*. Live free, friends, in Jesus Christ—and nowhere else--in a world given back to us.

Let's recognize and let's help God's people that we're privileged to serve that this business of “gospel ministry” is categorically different in theological packages that maybe even speak of a trinitarian God and a dual nature Christ and hold a high view of the Scriptures, yet who believe, teach and confess an anthropology that is skewed. “Justification by grace through faith in the merits of Christ” is a completely different scheme when taught by a free willer, compared to the “justification by grace through faith in the merits of Christ” over against the backdrop of the truth about the fallen human; one fallen so far that he is bound to invent his own gods (cf. Luther on the 1st Commandment in the Large Catechism) and his own way to appease this God. It is this truth that causes us Lutherans to think a bit more about the *ministry/service* that the economy of God wishes to be brought to bear—proclaiming Christ, that is, not merely speaking about Him. It means we have to come to grips with God Hidden. And speak for Him.

Pastoral Ministry Involves *Docendi Evangelium*

Do people even pay attention when you say, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”? Are they listening when you speak, “As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It's a direct line to the Deity that you claimed. Do they chuckle a bit and liken you to Dan Akroyd and John Belushi in “Blues Brothers,” who were so comedically claiming they were “on a mission from God”?

The direct line—first person discourse that occurs both ways in the liturgy of our churches—is remarkable! Minister speaking for God—“I forgive you.” Who else speaks like this?

Proclamation—actual delivery of the goods—in the name of God is a far different thing than mere information sharing. If God promises to arrive—and then actually delivers the goods of forgiveness, life and salvation—in a promise, the faithful Church is to state such a promise in the name of God. This God Who Hides is to be revealed in speech—speech that passes through the lips of each individual saint who holds the keys, yes, (more about this in a bit). But it certainly is to be speech that passes through the vocal chords and lips of the Lutheran pastor. They look at you and wonder, “Is he a kook?” Or “Who does he think he is?”

And the crazy thing is that the folks in our assemblies regularly simply respond with, “Amen.” Truth! That's the way it is! According to the promise of God, I, who was enslaved to silly gods, to high-and-mighty ideas, to *nihilism*, am free!” Amen.

Gerhard Forde writes more about this I-to-you kind of speech in the name of God:

To delineate precisely what is meant by proclamation, it is necessary and helpful, at the outset, to distinguish between two different types of discourse employed in the church. We have already been doing that roughly by articulating the difference between explaining and proclaiming. This difference can be maintained as a difference between primary and secondary discourse. Explaining, talking, and writing about God and things theological is secondary discourse. It is the language of theology in general, the language of teaching, and, particularly for our purposes here, of scholarship or systematic theology. Secondary discourse is generally third-person, past-tense discourse. Proclamation, on the other hand, belongs to the primary discourse of the church. Proclamation in its paradigmatic or ideal form is first-to-second-person, present-tense, unconditional address. The most obvious example (paradigmatic form) of such address is in the absolution: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the triune God. (When it comes right down to it, that is about all we have to say in a nutshell.) It is first-to-second-person: I declare to you. It is present tense: here and now I do it. Not tomorrow, not next week, not on judgment day, but here and now in the living present. The deed is done. I give it to you. It is unconditional: I do not say: "God will forgive you if certain conditions are fulfilled, if you properly repent." Nor do I say that we will pray and hope that God will forgive you. I do not say, "May the Lord have mercy on you." No, I say it flat out: "I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins." It is proclamation. As such, it belongs to the primary discourse of the church, the chief way the church and the Christian address the world.

It is perhaps obvious from this that there are other kinds of communication that also belong to this primary discourse. The liturgy, for instance, belongs to such primary discourse, as well as the sacraments. Moreover, the response to the proclamation, the language of repentance, confession, prayer, and praise also belongs to the primary discourse. Primary discourse as direct, present-tense, first-to-second-person address demands the same kind of language in response. If I proclaim: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, the corresponding response is likewise first-person, present-tense: I repent, I confess, I believe, I praise and thank you, O Lord, or perhaps even, I do not, I will not, I cannot. In any case it is primary. When the proclamation comes, "I declare to you the forgiveness of your sins," the appropriate response is not, "Well, that's your opinion!" It is not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion of you, it could be something quite different! The proclamation is instead the divine address, speaking not my words but the word God has commissioned me to say. The only possible response has to be primary discourse, discourse that is ultimately self-disclosure, revealing who you are. You can only say, I repent, I believe, or I do not.²⁸

"He who listens to you, listens to me. He who listens to me, listens to Him Who sent me."²⁹ When the spokesman of the Bride of Christ speaks for her Heavenly Bridegroom, it is a promise that such is the voice of God Himself. No grand spiritual quest expected. No peacocking before the throne room of God.

And some of us pastors are tempted sometimes to wonder what it is that we have to give to the neighbor around us. Some of us don't have buildings that are worth comparing to just about anything. Some of us don't have assemblies full of beautiful people. Some of us have embarrassed

²⁸ Gerhard Forde, *The Preached Word: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) pp. 45-46

²⁹ Lk 10:16

treasurers struggling to not think badly about others in the Church. Some of us have downright ugly fights going on barely under the surface of the happy smiling at church. Some of us have so-called leaders who we wouldn't work for if we had that choice in the secular world. And yet you also are blessed by so many appreciative people who weep when you arrive for your installation, who were praying and are praying for you and your family. Who treat you like "the fragrance of life" because of the aroma of Christ around you, dear Lutheran pastor. But, no matter how they look on a certain day in the assembly, you, dear maggot sack Lutheran pastor, get to turn around and see all that humanity in front of you and you get to speak a Word that does the doing. "I forgive you." And let you, dear Lutheran pastor, take to heart the words Jesus promised on Easter Sunday night, "Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven."³⁰

Contrast this with the "Words of Assurance" from the PCA congregation in MHK: "The Words of Assurance declare the good news that all those who hope in Jesus alone to make them right with God are forgiven, not based on their own merits, but based on God's promise of salvation in Christ." (Ephesians 1:7-8 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.")³¹ Secondary discourse. This good guy, sincere and well-intentioned, and one who is pretty clean on the depravity of the humans, simply can't wrap his theological conscience around *actually delivering the goods*. He'll talk about it, but won't deliver it.

Do we call this to the attention of God's people enough, dear Lutheran pastors? How about we recognize how much they all need to hear something that is as rare as it gets—the free and full forgiveness of their sins directly announced to them by the Called minister of Christ in the name of God? This, after all, is what's so offensive about the Lutheran ministry ("What gives *you* the right?"), compared to the trendy pastor's really passionate ramblings about God.

Of course, this doesn't mean you need to only do this in the assembly. I am aware that some of us are trying to revive the practice of private confession and absolution. Frankly, I also felt a bit better about the lukewarm reception for this old custom that I sense from some of us when Professor Deutschlandler pointed out to a bunch of us in a Summer Quarter class in Omaha that "that's what's going on in counseling." Well, that's what went on in Herr Deutschlandler's "counseling," as plenty of us know.

Let's also recognize the importance of secondary discourse in the Church; we DO teach much about God and Jesus and the Church. Let's also recognize how each of you pastors is actually capable of wonderful custom-fit Christo-centric Bible studies for the people the Lord of the Church has Called you to serve. I am not speaking against using others' work, nor do I intend to lower the sales of NPH's good offerings these days. And I DO understand and appreciate how much some guys are very well-served (and so are their people) by using other brothers' excellent Christo-centric Bible studies. Let not such desk work always replace the hard work of getting into the lives of the people who need to be served by you.

One more bit about the God Who Hides and your proclamation of God Hidden/Revealed in the Incarnate One and keeping appointments in the assembly of the embodied humans who are in contact with the Incarnate One via proclamation and sacrament: Coming to grips with the God

³⁰ Jn 20:23

³¹ <https://manhattanpres.com> from their website for 8.17.25 worship, accessed 8.18.25.

Who wants us to live by faith and not by sight³² wants people to be saved by being served Christ proclaimed in Word and Sacrament. This is God Preached. This is the only way He promises to make and then keep appointments with humans—in proclamation and in Word with water and in Word with wafer/wine. Here—in God Preached--there is certainty regarding the human and the Divine.

But what about God Not Preached—God in His altogether—God nude? What about when the person you are serving asks you where God is when the cancer showed up or when the husband/father did the unspeakable, or when the unconscionable happened in the body of Christ? What do you say in the name of God then? What do you say about the goofy things that seem to be occurring? What about when they want to know more about God that He has let be known, so far?

I have no doubt that the sin of Lucifer was something like this, that he wanted to find out and know more about the unknown God than became his station, that is, about the God who has not been revealed and disclosed through the Word. What He is, what He does, and what His will is does not concern me. But this does concern me, that I know what He has commanded, what He has promised, and what He has threatened. When you reflect on these things carefully, you find God, yes, He Himself takes you on His lap. If you fall out of it, that is, if you presume to know anything beyond what has been revealed in the Word, you plunge into the depths of hell.

Therefore the well-known hermit was right when he gave the advice: If you see a young monk ascending to heaven and so to speak, putting one foot in heaven, pull him back at once; for if he puts both feet there, he will see that he is not in heaven but in hell.

This saying gives no other advice than that we should restrain our curiosity and remain within the definite bounds that are placed before us by God. He wanted us to walk on the earth, not on the clouds. He wanted us to learn the revealed Word painstakingly, not to give thought to those things that are too high for us. He wanted us to follow His Word and command, not to inquire with inordinate diligence into the reasons for His commands. When Adam and Eve do this, they perish; for they put themselves in the place of God the Creator and forget that they are creatures.

It is just as Satan says: “Then you will be like gods.” You will no longer be creatures who will be concerned about carrying out the commands of God; you yourselves will be gods, you will judge God, and you will do other things—things that are proper for God alone.

Oh, the wretched divinity with which Satan surrounded us through sin when he had this one design, that we should disregard the commands and promises of God. Therefore it is original sin to become a god. Against this disease we must fight throughout our entire life, and we must say with Paul (1 Cor. 2:2): “I know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”³³

Here is faithful speech for the shepherd who is Lutheran. Let's resist the temptation to say more than we should say—as if we know what's going on in the mind of God, based on what we can see.

³² 2 Co 5:7

³³ LW 3: Ge 17:12

Let's refrain from speculation about things. Let's let the thing be the thing—that means for us to actually say the remarkable promise of the forgiveness of sins, new life and salvation for you—in Jesus Christ—to actually put it to and through our lips for the edifying of Christ's holy people.

“And promises to provide His Church with qualified servants (ministers) to *lead* His people in carrying out this commission.”

“To lead.” After all we've said about the gospel *ministry* being the thing, the rite says that the ministers (of the gospel) are provided “to *lead* His people in carrying out this commission.” And so, even we confessional Lutherans talk about leadership in the Church. No, we don't call it “leadership” in the Confessions, do we? We call it the *ministerium docendi*, as opposed to Rome's *magisterium*. Theologically, they're the ones who think of their clergy as leading, categorically. Of course, that's true. If the thing they're up to has work-doing at the heart of it, then leadership is needed to lead the people to do what is in them. The Lutheran confession is clear about being a *minister*, that is, a servant of the gospel to another human in contradistinction to Rome that thinks of it as being a *magister*.

So it seems healthy and wise for us Lutherans to think well and carefully about leadership. The legalizers out there who view their task in the church primarily as leadership do so honestly. They're not handing over the goods; they are encouraging a deal to get worked out. We are Called *ministers* of the gospel, not *magisters*, and certainly not *magisters* of the Church. But even the most ministry-minded among us have to admit that the ministry of the gospel as a pastor also has to include leadership. Think about the Lutheran elementary school teacher who is awesome at “teaching,” but who can't manage, that is, lead the classroom of sixteen kids. I definitely want us to be, above all, servants of the gospel of Jesus Christ to sinners. But we Lutheran pastors can't not be leaders of people. And of all the kinds of people from all the socio-economic strata that I pray find their way into your orb for you to serve.

I think it's helpful to see the parallel to husbanding and to fathering that Luther sees in the different God-given estates. You can't not lead your wife as you love and serve her in a Christ-like manner. You can't not lead your family as you and your wife love and serve your children by giving them honorable parenting; you're unfaithful to either if you follow and don't lead, if you only serve all the time. You, dear Lutheran pastor, can't not lead.³⁴ Timothy had to be bucked up with power and love and self-discipline to overcome his timidity.³⁵ Let's recognize it's part of your task. You are to lead in a serving way and to serve in a leading way in the name of Jesus.

But you are to lead differently compared to the other “Christian” leaders out there. You are not to lord it over the people you're Called to serve.³⁶ They say that there's a little pope in every pastor. Guard against it.

“The Lord Jesus and this congregation have Called you to serve in the pastoral ministry.”

And now we arrive at a Divine Call and at “pastoral ministry” and “congregation—what is so often the case and certainly is the case here. We assert that it is a Call from the Lord through the Church to a specific individual as the Bride of Christ does what she's given to do by her Heavenly Bridegroom.

³⁴ ML, 4th Commandment, Large Catechism, pp. 405-409

³⁵ 2 Tim 1:7

³⁶ 1 Pet 5:3

There is an individual standing in the assembly at the head of the assembly. No one else is being asked to serve as pastor. A group of stewards of the keys in a particular place and a man are brought together in the name of the Lord, Jesus, the Lord of the Church. Do we overstate this holy uniting—the divinity of a Call from the Lord through His Church to their pastor?³⁷ Or do we understate it?

I've heard a couple of older guys commenting on the old NWC video with a scene of two boys talking about being sent by the Lord of the Church someday to where He wanted you to go; "Sign me up to that adventure!" was the response as a kid then. These days, some DP types hear and are sensitive to narratives of students (and their parents) needing agency in the Call process. A wise brother made a great point that the divinity of the Call doesn't depend on the mystery of what's in the black box (of the process itself).³⁸ The Lord of the Church guides His Church in and with the means of grace. The Church, therefore, and her ministers are always working together until Jesus comes again. Who's the boss? Who decides? Whose Church is it? The Lord of the Church is Jesus. Let the faithful Bride of Christ work together faithfully under our Head, Who is Christ, and let whatever "process" that is used in getting qualified candidates for such gospel ministry to their place be worthy of the Lord's name.

Consider this encouragement to speak like a Lutheran when we're talking about the Call of the Lord through His Church and let's try not to speak fast and loose like some who claim the Spirit's working outside of the external means.³⁹ It is the Lord of the Church and a minister of the Lord's Church that are working together to decide if he'll move to come and serve as their pastor.

And let's continue to do what it seems to me has been a part of our culture--not encouraging ecclesiastical climbing. It is wonderful to explain to congregations who are asking the Lord for another pastor that the mindset our church seeks to encourage in its students who intend to be candidates for the public ministry of the gospel: *Let the Call of the Lord seek the servant; not the servant seek a particular Call to a particular place.*

Qualifications--In the rite, the assembly and the pastor listen again to "The Lord's will concerning this calling..." Paul's words from the pastoral epistles are quoted and some can be tempted to think that when we speak of "qualifications" in the Church, it is performance-by-the-pastor oriented, as if he earned the right to be one of the few and the proud. Professor Vallesky's quarterly article is so helpful: Even in the eyes of man (both the church and the world) a person will always be at best relatively ἀνεπιλημπτος and ἀνεγκλητος.⁴⁰ This doesn't mean, of course, that Prof. Valleskey was saying that the Biblical qualifications in the pastoral epistles are as malleable as a wax nose. It simply must be observed that it's good for us to not push the qualifications that make their way into the rite as something that actually all of us have kept to the letter of the law—as if you can achieve your way into candidacy for the ministry of the gospel (like the *opinio legis* would suggest). If a brother finds himself "relatively above reproach, or as one who is relatively apt to teach" count it as a gift of God in Christ.

³⁷ AC, XIV, Kolb/Wengert, p. 47

³⁸ Rev. Matthew W. Scharf. Except I know he said it better than I quoted him saying it.

³⁹ Apology 8, 10 Kolb/Wengert, p. 323 "We should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is from the devil."

⁴⁰ David Valleskey, WLQ, p. 6 "The Pastor Must Be Above Reproach," from WLS essay file.

Prof. Valleskey's article, above all, underlines the line that is specifically cited in the rite of installation to the pastor about to be installed: "In all your tasks and responsibilities, our Lord Jesus equips you with the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the gift that makes you truly competent as a servant of Christ. St. Paul wrote, 'Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.'"⁴¹

Where did the candidate for the pastoral ministry in this place on this Sunday come from? Somewhere else. A family with a background—a pastor's kid, a Lutheran teacher kid's kid, a kid who grew up in a lay person's home, the son of a single mom, from a home that knew nothing of the gospel. He came from somewhere. He has at least some kind of a history of schooling. In my humble experience as one Called by the Lord to serve the Church as an admissions/recruitment servant, that is, as one who encouraged young men to consider being a student for candidacy for the public ministry of the gospel as a pastor, I became aware of so many well-intentioned folks who thought they knew a future pastor when they saw the sweet Jesus boy. OK, some of us were that. Maybe. Sometimes. More of us were simply boys. Let's not expect a future pastor to look like a pastor until he's actually ready to be a candidate for it. Thousands of man/hours of pastoral formation will make a difference.

Perhaps the man at the front of the assembly is from the field, which makes us think about the Call process in our synod. It is remarkable to me to consider how many ways a pre-Call meeting or a Call meeting at any particular congregation could fly apart into chaos. And so often, the unbelievable and overwhelming atmosphere is one of trust—high trust. I attribute this to the grace of God in Christ that the Word of forgiveness, life and salvation and peace in Christ Jesus actually does do the uniting of humans with the holy God and also unites us with one another in the Lord, Jesus. Satan certainly tries to sow fear and division. But where the ministry of the gospel has been brought to bear and is being brought to bear, there is *shalom*, comparatively speaking.

The man at the installation service might be fresh out of our seminary, and might have been assigned by our synod's Assignment Committee. Who decides if the appropriate level of qualification has been reached for candidacy? The Church, of course. Before candidacy? Of course, our seminary. Its board. Our BME helps our four MinEd schools and their ministers of the gospel work together for the good of the Church. The Synodical Council works together to allocate mission offerings appropriately, according to the perceived needs of the kingdom. The COP works together as congregations and Calling bodies all seek to bring the ministry of the gospel to bear in their corner of the world. The synod in convention. We believe, teach and confess that the Church exists where the gospel is purely proclaimed and where the sacraments are rightly administered. And when all those entities continue to work together in Jesus' name, it is nothing less than a miracle, for the old adage is true, "Where the Lord is building His Church, we also count on Satan seeking to build a chapel."

Let the faithful hear the promise that Jesus really is our Head and is to be seen as such by all of us. "He is the Lord of the harvest who will send laborers into His harvest; our task is to pray (Mt 9:38)."⁴²

It's been a conscious decision by our church body to have maggotsack pastors who actually have parish experience to be doing this preparing-for-candidacy work that our MLC & WLS professors are doing. That we have men serving at WLS and MLC who are legitimate academic types--second

⁴¹ 2 Co 3:5

⁴² LW 26:18

to none—is wonderful. That they all served in real flesh-and-blood parishes that were on the ground—that's rare. And really wise. It means that those men came to their advanced degrees after accepting a Call to serve in this special way—that's rare. And difficult for the men and their families. But I think it simply wonderful to have men who know the parish, not just in theory, but in an actual real place with actual real people who actually called them “pastor” for a time. I realize that not all of us pastors need to think about this all the time—that's why we have asked others to pay attention to these things. But it is wise that we in the grass roots congregations of the synod realize that this is a unicorn way to do it. We've had outsiders to our church body take a long and careful look at both of our terminal schools—MLC and WLS. And both were called “unicorns,” by each of those groups.

In our seminary that still serves the vast majority of men desiring candidacy for pastoral ministry residentially, we've said we're about preparing *generalists*. *Transparochial* is a term that Dr. Bruss at the St. Louis seminary in LCMS has used in his attempt to advocate for candidates who genuinely say, “Here am I; send me!” Men—either first or second career—who are candidates to be generalists and transparochial seems good. I bet the president of our seminary does not take this business of being residential, of preparing generalists and transparochial candidates for granted. It seems wise for us pastors to at least pay attention to how easily a synod can move away from we take for granted in the present.

Promises by the Pastor re Scripture & Confessions; Preaching the Word (like a Lutheran)

In the diploma of vocation, the congregation solemnly charged the pastor they were Calling to “preach the gospel of our Lord among us in its truth and purity (and) to administer the sacraments in accordance with the inspired Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as incorporated in the Book of Concord of 1580, and to establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice at all times;”

It's still remarkable—public discourse. And it's still quite rare—that humans can stand up and string meaningful words together in front of an assembly. And you, dear Lutheran pastor, when you are called on to stand up and say something—and something that *saves* (!), you can do it very well. Paul wanted Timothy to dedicate himself to public reading of Scripture—to preaching and to teaching. You are, arguably, very qualified *readers* of the Scriptural text; it's ok to actually do it. Teach by emphasizing in each of the readings what ought to be emphasized and not messing it up like so many Arminian readers who can't handle a Greek subjunctive and who therefore emphasize the “might,” for example.

“Let the thing be the thing” (the public reading of Scripture—preaching and teaching). This can be one of those items for circuit study—one of the brothers is tapped to be critiqued for all things sermonic. This is much easier these days with so many doing sermons that are archived on the congregation's website. It is the single most notable feature of serving in my present role as a DP; I sometimes get to be in the assembly and I get to be served. And I note the excellence of faithful *preaching* in our congregations. It's not preaching *at* in our assemblies; it is a Law/gospel verbal connection between pastor and people in the name of God. It is delivery of the goods. It makes me quietly weep at the sheer joy of what/Who just got poured into my ears many times.

“The joy of Christ for us is the privilege of Christ through us,” is the way the devotion leader⁴³ at our last synod convention said it. Spot on. And you get to be that clay pot in your part of the

⁴³ Rev. Jesse Stern

kingdom. Allow yourself to marvel at such grace upon grace. You know the depths. You know the dark night of the soul. There is nothing that can surprise you, dear Lutheran pastor. And you get to pour *Christ pro nobis* Who is so needed into the ears of any and all who are within earshot.

Every now and then, I do run across a brother who's tempted to think that the proclamation is the only thing. To preach the Word is, of course, everything. But the Word is to get into the ears of, well, *somebody*. To preach the Word faithfully is to proclaim it *to humans*. That is, one needs to do the hard work of making contact with humans and then doing the hard work of loving the humans and serving them and moving them, eventually, into the assembly which is where they are at home in Christ.

The rite asks the pastor to swear to preach according to the canonical books of the Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura*, we confess, yes, but we stand on the shoulders of all those who have gone before. We don't hold to *Nuda Scriptura*. It's part of the reason why your seminary has exposed you to Historical Theology also—we in this time and age stand on the shoulders of all the faithful who have gone before us in the Lord's Church; we're not the first to encounter the Word and we won't be the last.

The pastor is asked about the ecumenical creeds. It might strike some in the assembly as a bit overdone—to think that creedal Christianity matters in a decidedly anti-historical (or is it?) time and in a decidedly anti-creedal time (or is it?) There is so much content to be taught. Let's be really clear how much the Lutheran confession states its intent to be catholic.⁴⁴ Let us humbly confess with the faithful confessors from before us. And let's also boldly confess with them in Christ.

You are the ones who get to set the humans free from their own silly religion projects and from their silly gods; you get to deliver the goods—to speak forgiveness of sins to humans for God. And you're never surprised when the first time visitor to your assembly is enraptured at the proclamation coming out of your lips. No, it's not because you're such a rhapsodic orator (although maybe that's true with you). It's because genuine law that accuses the sinner of being a sinner grabs and doesn't let go until the rarest speech of all wings its way through your feeble lips into their ears and hearts—Christ crucified and risen for them. This is 1st person discourse that doesn't give you an excuse to overshare about you, but compels you to proclaim liberty for the captives *extra* those in the assembly and *in* Jesus Christ.

It is fun for me in the study on the Doctrine and Practice of the Divine Call that we go through during a pastoral vacancy to ask folks how many distinct Christian denominations there are. I, after all, like so many, really like the idea of being merely Christian, without all the denominational labels. But when they learn how many denominations there are, public statements of what we believe, teach and confess is authentically catholic and faithfully Lutheran--The Book of Concord—land differently. It is NOT about being the best denomination, better than those guys. It is about faithfulness in the cultural context of tens of thousands of Christian denominations to ask the pastor to swear to uphold the Lutheran Confessions “because they are true expositions of the Word of God.” Every single time through the Doctrine of the Divine Call, we talk about this. Please pay attention to the mouthful that is being confessed here and don't miss it before going on. This is not merely saying that we're the Lutheran ones; it's about the catholicity of our proclamation, no less. Truth, no less. Not merely working on the WELS club. Or the Lutheran club. Let's be the Church; Let's speak *for the Godhead*, not for the club. And “they are forgiven,” says Jesus.

⁴⁴ AC, XXI, Kolb/Wengert, p. 59; Apology, Kolb/Wengert, p. 175

“And correct presentations of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church”

Let “correct” speech focus especially not on the correctness of lawthink. Let us land on the correctness of it all resting on Christ as the highest revelation of God. And, at a time when the legalisms of all the churches—either from the right or the left—is the common way to think about it, let the “doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” that actually centers in Jesus as the LORD’s Christ and as the One Who rules in the kingdom of God be the thing. There’s no need to be the angry, scared Lutheran who’s worried about his denomination; let’s be the Church. There’s no promise that your 501 c 3 congregation will be around until Jesus comes again. Nor that our synod will be around. But the Church--those who listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus—she’ll be around. And that means the gospel will be around. And that means—miraculously—there will be those brought from darkness to light and who will pass on the gospel in Word and Sacrament to other humans until Jesus comes again. Let’s be about the work/Word/gospel of the Bride of Christ, shall we?

The pastor is solemnly charged to teach. There is much to “teach”. How to do it when they are so in-articulate? So illiterate, especially regarding the Scriptures? How to do it when some want to dig in and others not so much? How to do it when no one else does—and your “preaching” is so completely *other* than theirs is? I don’t know—but I trust you can figure it out in your context with the others who are there with you by the grace of God, especially by actually listening to the people you seek to serve in God’s name.

How? Faithful Catechesis—no apologies; call it what you want, but let’s teach. When the Roman Catholics can expect six months for their RCIC, we don’t have to apologize for helping people understand how distinct the theology of the cross is from all the theologies of glory. And while we are talking catechesis—how about a consideration of using the enchiridion? You simply can’t miss the spirit of authentic catholic and evangelical teaching in ML’s Small Catechism. Here’s a shameless plug for Tom Jeske’s self-published enchiridion that is printed and sold via the MLC bookstore. Really, can you do better than the authentically catholic Lutheran spirit that you simply can’t not catch in the enchiridion? From dealing with the Tetragrammaton as the very first word to a people that are still around. The name. The will of God. Sinfulness that sins. The un-free will of man. Belief and confession that one can’t believe without the Spirit’s work. The incarnation. The LORD—Jesus. The new life. The keys. Vocation. To teach the catechism means we’ll think about preaching and teaching in “truth and purity” in an evangelical liberating Lutheran way, not an angry reactionary mode. Remember who it is that refers to St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians as his “Kitty,” his beloved bride. His was a warm marriage everyone recognizes. Paul wants to emasculate those who don’t take such liberation seriously. And Luther sings some of his best tunes when intoning on the Freedom of a Christian. That’s who we are in the name of the Triune God; that’s why the body of Christ made us swear to teach in a way that has been called “Lutheran,” which the Lutherans hated at the start, but which they then adopted and then went on to prove how authentically catholic and evangelical their teaching was—what the Church *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*.⁴⁵ has been and what it will be til Jesus comes again.

The group assembled for the installation is confessing to knowing AC V. They want and need preaching of the gospel—not the law—they mentioned this right up front in the “solemn charge.” “When Christians call others to preach publicly, this does not eliminate their own right and natural inclination to share the gospel with others privately as they have opportunity. They have not

⁴⁵ Always, everywhere, and by everyone

handed over or transferred their right to use the keys to the pastor, but they have conferred on him the public exercise of the common rights.”⁴⁶ They are NOT handing over the entire duty to this servant, for they still maintain the duty and delight of gospel proclamation since they, indeed, have the keys. But they do need to be reminded of this. Every single time I go through the Doctrine and Practice of the Divine Call with a congregation, I point out Jesus’ giving of the keys to the assembled ones on Easter Sunday night and ask them the last time that they had forgiven the sins of anyone else—a spouse, or child, or friend, or co-worker. It is always silence. And they always seem to take it to heart how awesome it is that each of them gets to take the risk of forgiving the sins of another, knowing that Jesus says of that, “They are forgiven.”

In the diploma of vocation, the congregation specifically asks the pastor to “establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice at all times.” It is a great time to re-teach, over and again, how the Lutherans, following Martin Luther, St Paul’s best expositor, are the ones who liberate the enslaved sinners out of their natural enslaved condition—enslaved to other gods and enslaved, therefore, to sins and especially, so often, to beautiful and well-intentioned legalistic modes of religiosity. “Don’t let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”⁴⁷ It is for freedom that Christ sets the sinners free. Let no one say it better than the faithful Lutheran pastor.

To be a *Seelsorger* in an *evangelische* manner, especially with those on the edges and to “be ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ’s kingdom”

Let’s also think for a minute about how we genuinely educate the students attempting to become candidates for the pastoral ministry. Do they receive a legitimate education about it all? Or are they given the equivalent of an HVAC worker certified to work with a particular company’s hardware and software? Technicians or theologian/pastors/ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Especially in a day when the humanities are being killed in the universities (cf. Chronicle of Higher Ed of September 6th), more and more are simply not capable of thinking, much less critical thinking. I think that the typical pastor in our fellowship doesn’t realize how well he has been prepared to be comfortable enough in his own skin to shut up and listen, listen, listen to anybody and anything and to learn humbly. And then, when called on to say something worthwhile, our pastors, by the grace of God have much more to say than, “Here’s what I’m really passionate about!” As if I should care how passionate you are about a boat or a vacuum cleaner or what you think about St. Paul or Jesus. I need to know what *God* has to say to me—if it’s anything at all; that’s why a human needs a shepherd of their *soul*.

“The world tempts us to play its games and to serve as business managers, as social directors, as the “cheapest shrinks” in town. Within the church arise temptations to organize and to institute and use power in the world’s way. Inevitably the law must govern the relationships of people within the institutional life of the church. But pastors must remember that their call has to do with the gospel. Whatever other duties they must or may assume, their people count on them to do what God has designed their calling to do, “Preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest...not by human power but by God’s Word alone.” (CA 28:21, BC 84; German).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ John Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, (Milwaukee: NPH, 2009), p. 148

⁴⁷ Galatians 5:1

⁴⁸ Robert Kolb, *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, (Minneapolis; Fortress, 1990), p.59

We've said we want pastors to be *Seelsorgers* and the diploma of vocation solemnly charges the pastor is "to discharge toward all the members of our congregation the functions of a pastor, that is, to *watch over their souls in an evangelical manner.*" Many congregation members speak to what they hope for in a pastor in the pre-Call meetings and I haven't yet read or heard anyone ever ask for a pastor to *watch over their souls in an evangelical manner.* But when we read through the diploma of vocation in the study on the Doctrine and Practice of the Divine Call to begin their first Call meeting, all of the people invariably do one of those comfortable body language statements; *oh, that's what I really want, don't I?* Of course everybody thinks they want a beautiful young pastor with a beautiful perfect family who draws other beautiful young families to the congregation like bees to honey. But when the pastor at the Call meeting helps them see what the Lutheran pastor actually is and what they are actually solemnly charging their pastor to do, they never ever want to change the wording of the five paragraphs in which they solemnly charge him with duties.

Of course it can be hard to have accountability metrics that faithfully reflect the diploma of vocation. How, exactly, does one gauge the *Seelsorger* metrics? Regular reports by the pastor to the congregation or mission board are so important to build and to then maintain the atmosphere of mutual trust in the body of Christ. Each part of the body has its part to play. The visits by the pastor to members, the visits he makes on the un or de-Churched, the visits he attempts to make to those either in the cracks or falling into them. Paul recognizes that one plants and another waters, but it is the Lord of the Church Who makes it grow. Accountability in terms of faithfulness, especially for the pastor, accountability in actually doing what he is to be doing—serving Christ in Word and Sacrament to people and being a *Seelsorger*, catechizing and teaching humans the gospel, being ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ's kingdom and devoting time, strength and ability to the general advancement of the kingdom of Christ, all while being a faithful husband and father are most helpful in the high trust world of the Church.

I care greatly if the pastors in our corner of the kingdom actually attend circuit meetings and I care greatly what is on the agenda. I care very much about the content of the agenda of our conferences and district conventions. I want no part of a brother (or his wife) feeling the temptation to say it was a waste of precious pastoral time "to go to conference." Let the brothers dig deeply together in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek New Testament and in the Confessions and on some other hot topic of choice of the circuit pastor. Let them all be present. While that is not the only place where a pastor can be built up, it surely can be a great place for the "mutual consolation of the brothers." And that has benefit not only for the brothers, but for their families and for the congregations those faithful pastoral brothers serve. I do subscribe to the warning about lone wolves, that is, men who can't seem to find the time to ever attend circuit studies or conferences. And I strongly encourage each brother to sink deep roots into your new corner of the kingdom.

Of course, many in the congregation will want to be your friend—after all, you're a relative rare package—a non-threatening, yet strong and educated male who is at least somewhat socially sensitive. But, be clean and clear that what they really need; it is for you to be their pastor—that is, to be doing the doing--"watching over their souls."

When the diploma or the rite mentions "members," it means we think of each other in our 501 c 3 as fellow parts of the *body of Christ*, with Him as our Head. It means we take our interdependence seriously and it means we share our burdens with others as needed and we take on others' burdens as needed under our Head Who is Christ and for the good of the whole body. No disparaging of the other. It means we think of each other differently in this group than so many do in other places. Family in Christ. Brothers and sisters in Christ. No competition here. No fights here,

although Lutheranism, the only confessional denomination to not have polity in the definition, continues to prove that it consists of sinners with fights, fights, and more fights over who is in charge of the church until a good a faithful word that reminds all of Who is actually in charge—the LORD, Jesus. Membership here decidedly does not mean club membership.

The pastor always has been asked in the diploma of vocation “to be ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ’s kingdom”—how, exactly? With the hard work to make contact with humans who hide and to then hand over to them what they’ve probably never heard before. Both individually and corporately. The pastor who is serving the entire group can’t not see how many souls out there don’t care about their souls.⁴⁹ The pastor serving the entire group gets to help them see the way it really is with the human condition.⁵⁰ They can’t not be taught how natural it is to do law-think, especially in the religious world.⁵¹ They can’t not be taught the first thesis of Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation: “The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, does not aid a man on the way to righteousness, but rather hinders him.”⁵² They need to hear the gospel of life that sets them free. Over and over again.

And the pastor is solemnly charged to be a “minister of Christ and an example.” Here we note how little one is able to compartmentalize the life and time of the pastor, as much as so many of us want to do with our time-management skills and tools. You are never not a pastor, now that you’ve accepted the Call to serve in this way. Again, this assumes we know what a “minister of Christ” actually does. It means that the wise minister of the gospel, the pastor, will know the difference between “the ministry of the Word and prayer” and “waiting on tables.”⁵³ It means you’ll recognize that part of being a faithful minister is to love your wife like Christ loved the Church and to be a God-the-Father-like father to your children, raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, which is to set them free to live solidly on the Rock that is Christ and to live freely in Christ in trust before God and in love for the neighbor.⁵⁴

And the Diploma solemnly charges the pastor to “devote his time, strength and ability to the general advancement of the kingdom of Christ.” It’s no secret that “kingdom of God” talk or “kingdom of Christ” talk has gotten wonky in so many parts of Christendom; it leans inevitably to a theology of glory, as is the natural bent of the humans. It is the Lutheran confession that wants us to be skeptical of thinking we see things the way they are, as a theologian of glory claims.⁵⁵ Luther faithfully exposit St. Paul who teaches that the Church lives “by faith and not by sight.”⁵⁶ Luther is not teaching us a theology of suffering when he teaches the *theologia crucis* as opposed to *theologia gloria*. He is helping us come to grips with the God Who Hides *sub contrario*, that is, Who promises to be Really Present in the way He promises to arrive for the sinner.⁵⁷ It is the Lutheran confession that teaches the kingdom of God is where the ruling activity of the King of the Kingdom actually is. It is the Lutheran confession that isn’t impressed by glory and success, however that is defined. We

⁴⁹ Luke 12:19

⁵⁰ Ro 3

⁵¹ *Opinio legis*

⁵² LW 31:39

⁵³ Acts 6:1-4

⁵⁴ LW 31:371

⁵⁵ LW 31:40

⁵⁶ 2 Co 5:7

⁵⁷ LW 26:33-36 Luther is wonderful here: To the devil: “When you say I am a sinner, you provide me with armor and weapons against yourself, so that I may slit your throat with your own sword and trample you underfoot. You yourself are preaching the glory of God to me; for you are reminding me, a miserable and condemned sinner, of the fatherly love of God, who ‘so loved the world that He gave His only Son, etc.’”

believe, teach and confess, rather that we know what the kingdom is—and that it comes by itself even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us. And then we confess how said kingdom comes—when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.”⁵⁸. And the Lutheran confession is clear on what “gathering in of his harvest” means. The Lutherans believe, teach and confess that the existence of the Church is an article of faith, not of sight. And we believe/*credo/pistewo*—in the sense of *know*—where the LORD is building the Church—where the Gospel is purely proclaimed and the sacraments faithfully administered.

Sasse: “Then the question is immediately raised: Where does this one church become visible? Where is it knowable for us as a historical reality? And this does not mean for us, Where do we find the people who belong to this church? but rather, Where do we find Christ?

“But to this question we can only give one answer: Christ is present for us humans only in the Word and Sacrament. “Through the Word and Sacraments God gives the Holy Ghost where and when he will to them that hear the Gospel” (AC V 2). In the Word and Sacrament Christ the Lord truly comes to us. In them he is actually present; they are not mere symbols which remind us of a faraway Christ of the past. Thus the *media salutis* are at the same time the *notae ecclesiae*, the means of grace are the marks of the church.

“There are no other marks of the true church than the Word and the Sacrament, and indeed both exist in their inseparable unity. For there is only one grace—no particular sacramental grace, no particular grace of the Word—only one Holy Spirit, only one Christ. The Word and Sacraments are present before faith because they first awaken it. Where they are present there is the church. The Word and Sacraments are, however, concrete realities. The Word is preached and heard, the Sacraments, dispensed and received by living people in this empirical world. Wherever in Christendom the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments understood in the light of the Gospel are administered, there the church is an empirical reality in this world.”⁵⁹

The heretic, Luther, the outside-of-the-Church confessor, claimed that the corporate institution isn't the thing; only gospel proclamation and Sacrament administration creates and nurtures the Church; and only there do we trust she exists.

You promised to do all those things. And the installing pastor said to you, “The Almighty God, who has given you the desire to do these things, graciously give you the strength and compassion to perform them.”

God's people with their pastor, united in ministry of the gospel, promise their promises to you, living in the promises of God through the means, that is, through you....

We've spent a lot of time today on the solemn charges from God's people to you, dear pastors, in the name of God. We won't spend as much time on the miraculous promises that they also make under God and in Christ. But they are no less miraculous.

Should the Lord in his grace and mercy bring you to us, God's people in your congregation said to you:

⁵⁸ Small Catechism, Kolb/Wengert, pp. 356-357

⁵⁹ Hermann Sasse, (St. Louis, CPH) **The Lonely Way, Volume 1**, pp. 81-83

We will receive, honor and love you as our pastor.

Not, primarily, our buddy. It is such a countercultural thing as an American to confess to sheep-ness and to a relationship with another one who is my shepherd, my pastor, the one who watches out for me and for my soul over against the wolves of fake religiosity and hyper sincere good intentions of great things.

We will support your work among us with our prayers and personal assistance.

“Your work” does not mean it is the pastor’s church, like so many in Evangelical world think about their pastor. And like plenty of our people are tempted to act because, after all, genuine Evangelical gospel ministry is such a rarity and it can look so much like the legalistic religion-peddling that is so common. But God’s people are recognizing that the pastor’s task isn’t primarily their task; they are praying for one who is in an office that needs to exist, like the parenting office needs to exist for the family, like some kind of governance needs to be in place for government and its people.

And they know it’s their privilege to take care of you and your family.

We will provide your proper maintenance according to our ability, being mindful of our Lord's injunction that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:10; Galatians 6:6), and will for the present pay you promptly and regularly a salary of \$_____ per year, \$_____ as a housing allowance per year, \$_____ in Social Security per year, \$_____ for your retirement plan per year; _____ in mileage compensation, and the appropriate Health Insurance per WELS VEBA Plan _____

In addition we will be responsible for all moving expenses from your current location to _____.

Do we help perpetuate the myth of the Lutheran pastor who is like the Dominican friars, begging for their existence? Let’s not do that. Your District Presidents are paying attention to this issue every time there is a transition from one pastor to the next and God’s people, miraculously recognize that you depend on them for your day-to-day existence in a God’s mask kind of way. Most of the time, I get to see God’s people talking about the last thing to be converted (their money) in a way that is remarkable and beautiful. They want to take care of you with double honor.

Signed in behalf of and by authority of

_____ congregation

_____, Chairman

_____, Secretary

Given and signed this day of _____

These are real people who are really authorized to speak in the name of their 501 c 3. At a real point in time. Not later or before or forever. Now. It has been such an unexpected pleasure for me to work with the godly men who are the men who sign this diploma of vocation; these are men who have earned the high trust of others in their congregation and who care deeply about their congregation and their pastor. It has invariably been a joy and a pleasure to work with them.

It is part of the privilege of serving in the way that I presently serve that I get to attend a number of installations. I always think it is a miracle if anyone shows up—the Packers might be playing, or the Broncos. Or the Chiefs. But they do show up. And they bring their kids. They were praying to the Lord of the Church that they know in the crucified, humiliated face of Christ, trusting that He'd send them the pastor of His choosing and that He'd do that when He willed. And now you're there. And they assembled again. And they listened to the Word of God. They heard you or someone like you make promises in the name of the Living Lord, Jesus. And they promised.

And now the dance begins. It's a new dance. It's hard work, yes. And it's sometimes downright ugly. But it matters. It's beautiful. It's joyful. It's fun, even. This business of people united with the Deity on the basis of Jesus Christ's work mediated to the sinners by the Spirit's work using clay pots (you!) on humans.

It has regularly been a pleasure of mine to have both old and younger souls come up to me during the Call process, but especially after the service of installation. And I regularly see tears in the eyes of these sinner/saints. So precious is it to know the grace of God in the face of Christ Who came for the sinners. So foolish that He arrives in the foolishness of what is preached. So gracious to kill the old and to make alive the new—just as really dead and as really alive as is Jesus. So much is this all by faith and not by sight. And they so often confuse the messenger with the message. They are living what Paul was saying, “We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life”⁶⁰ They weep for joy when you show up to serve them.

If Jesus lives, this is not in vain. He does. You are jars of clay. You are maggot sacks. You are sinners who also—in Christ—are set free. And you get to set them free in Christ. When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away, not because you've earned it, but because our God is a God of grace upon grace.⁶¹

Dear Lutheran pastors, I thank God in my prayers for you.

Phil Hirsch 9.9.2025 for WLS Symposium

⁶⁰ 2 Co 2:15-16

⁶¹ 1 Pe 5:4

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