

The Installation of Fr. Ronald Roland as Pastor of
St. Andrew Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Memphis, Michigan
The First Sunday after Trinity, June 3, 2018 A. ✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

There were problems in the congregation. The Pastor that founded the congregation had left. There were schisms in the membership. There was disagreement and infighting. Divisions naturally developed. Some preferred one Pastor over another and took sides. A few members engaged in behavior that can only be described as immoral.

Members took action against other members. Holy Communion was not properly administered. And giving was down, which means that faith was diminished. The problem, of course, was that the members were fleshly men. The congregation was comprised of sinners. Perhaps you know what that means. Perhaps you have seen some of the same things at St. Andrews.

When it was reported to him, the condition of the congregation he had founded broke their first Pastor's heart. It brought him sorrow. So he wrote to them. He wrote a strong letter rebuking them for their sinful behavior and lack of love, which is to say for their lack of faith. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians to exhort them to stop their sinful behavior.

But why should the Corinthians listen to Paul? He wasn't there. He wasn't their Pastor any more. Other Pastors had come and gone. And many of them were quite happy with the way things were going in the congregation. Many of them were quite happy they were getting their own way.

That they understand his authority over them, that they come to know the responsibilities of the Pastoral Office, that they hearken to his voice and amend their ways, that they receive his correction and believe his doctrine - and be saved - the Apostle wrote "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

The Words of St. Paul are more than historic Pastoral admonition. They are Words, like all of Holy Scripture, true for every congregation comprised of fallen men. They are the very Word of God which is true for you this day. For it has pleased the Lord that called St. Paul to bring a new Pastor to St. Andrews. And what St. Paul writes is true of Pastor Roland. It is true of every Called and Ordained Pastor. So hearken then to the exhortation of the Apostle:

"Let a man so consider us...", Paul writes. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. St. Paul didn't look any different than other men. There is nothing about Pastor Roland's outward appearance, about his speech or his deportment, that would compel anyone to hearken to his voice above others.

But the Apostle calls on faith. He calls on you, you who are redeemed by Christ, to see the Ordained Pastor with different eyes: not fallen, fleshly eyes, but the eyes of faith. He asks you in Christ to consider Pastor Roland to be what he doesn't seem to earthly eyes to be. That's what faith does. Faith sees through the external, concrete signs and sees the Promises of Christ. Faith sees through Bread and Wine and sees Christ. Faith sees through plain water comprehended with God's Word and sees forgiveness, rebirth, and eternal life.

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And if you understand that, you'll understand the Office to which Pastor Roland is called. For the Christian Pastor isn't an extension of the Old Testament Priesthood. He doesn't offer sacrifices on your behalf. The Office of Pastor is a continuation of the Apostolic Ministry, the Ministry not of the Letter but of the Spirit. As he proclaims before the congregation each Sunday, he stands before you "in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ."

And what is it that the Apostle exhorts you to believe about Pastor Roland? Two things. First, that he is a "Servant of Christ." The word in the original language isn't just "servant". It's "slave". That's what Pastor Roland is, a slave, because that's what he promised to be when he took his Ordination vows. He placed himself into servitude, into slavery.

Slavery to whom? To Christ. Of course, the Pastor serves the members. That's what "Minister" means. But the members aren't his Master. He isn't an employee of the congregation. He is, as the Scripture teaches, "worthy of his wages". To that point, in one of the less flattering passages of Scripture that describes the Pastoral Office, the Apostle writes "you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."

Nor is the Michigan District Pastor Roland's Master. The Synod isn't his Master. Christ is. That means that Pastor Roland is bound, he must do, what his Master commands. And what his Master commands is always the best for you, the best for your salvation.

When he stands before you and says "I, by virtue of my Office as a Called and Ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto you, and in the stead, and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins...", he speaks those words not because it's a sunny Sunday and he decided to speak them. He speaks them out of compulsion – by "the command" of Christ, his Master.

That is what a Pastor does. That is, in secular terms, his job description. He brings Christ to you. He bestows upon you Christ's forgiveness. For Pastor Roland it is Law. He can't simply decide not to do it. To properly discharge his Pastoral duties, to satisfy the command of his Master, he must speak those words. But for you it is Gospel. Indeed, it is the sweetest Gospel. For by those words he brings you the forgiveness of all your sins. And forgiven, you are reconciled to God.

When Luther wrote his rite of private confession and absolution, he directed the Pastor to say "Do you believe that my absolution is God's absolution?" The answer of faith, the response that Luther places into your mouth, is "Yes, dear sir." For that forgiveness, Christ's forgiveness, is what faith hopes for. Faith is born of the Gospel Promise, and faith is fed and grows by the same Gospel Promise. Which brings us to the second thing St. Paul wants you to know about Pastor Roland.

It isn't his own forgiveness that he gives. Pastor Roland's forgiveness is nice, but it avails you nothing before God. As a servant of Christ, according to the Apostle's Words, according to Holy Scripture, along with being a slave of Christ, Pastor Roland is a "steward of the Mysteries of God."

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A steward dispenses things of value that aren't his. In the case of the Pastoral Office, the thing of value, the thing of the greatest value, is Christ. That is what Pastor Roland is given to distribute to you: the forgiveness that Christ won for you on the cross. His death on the cross avails you nothing until it is applied to you, until it is made yours, personally and individually.

For that Christ, the Lord of the Church, has sent Pastor Roland into your midst. That is the work of the Office he holds – he distributes Christ to you. He preaches Christ into you. He washes you in water tinged red with the Blood of Christ. He gives you Christ to eat and drink. He proclaims Christ's forgiveness to you. Through the Office of the Holy Ministry, through Pastor Roland, as through means, does God bestow upon you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

After asking if you believe that the Pastor's forgiveness is Christ's forgiveness, Luther's rite of private confession and absolution continues "As thou believest, so be it done to you." You believe that the Pastor's forgiveness is Christ's forgiveness, and it is. It is yours, now, here at St. Andrews, now, and forever, on earth as it is in heaven.

For you, dear Christian, it is truly Good News. It is the Gospel - for you. For where the Word and Sacraments are, there is Christ. And where Christ is, there is your hope, fulfilled. The God-given Marks of the Church are here, here at St. Andrew, here for you. In that you can trust. In that you will find great comfort and consolation. In that there is hope for you, hope of the eternal Promises of God fulfilled, hope of everlasting life.

The Corinthians repented and did what the Apostle commanded. Faith hearkens to the Word of God. His Second Epistle to them was one of soothing comfort. The Law fulfilled for them in Christ, the Apostle gave them sweet Gospel. And this day, the Law fulfilled for you in Christ, the Lord of the Church brings you His Body and Blood to eat and drink. And He brings you Pastor Roland's voice to speak Christ's Words, and Pastor Roland's hands to place Christ into your mouth. So believe, eat and drink, dear Christian. And rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.