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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
The Feast of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor
Saturday, January 28th, 2020
Sunday, January 29th, 2020

Sermon: The “Other” Lord’s Prayer
Text: Luke 10:1-9; Titus 1:1-9

Focus: Jesus instructs us to pray for pastors.

Function: That they would pray for their pastor and ask God to send more pastors.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity” (SC, 2nd Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. The words of Jesus: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 9:2, ESV).¹ When I was a pastor at my first congregation, there was a little boy named “Zak” who liked to follow me around on Sunday mornings. After Sunday school let out, he would follow me into vestry, sacristy, and sanctuary, as I put on my vestments and made sure the Communion was ready. One day, as he watched me tighten my cincture around my robe, a light dawned in my head. I turned to my little tagalong and asked, “Zak, do you ever think that you’d like to become a pastor someday?”

“Maybe. Can I be a pastor *and* an astronaut?”

I chuckled. “I don’t think so, Zak. You’ll have to choose.”

He furrowed his eyebrows and pursed his lips in deep thought before finally asking, “Is being a pastor hard work?”

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

“Yes,” I laughed, “being a pastor is hard work, but it’s *good* work. It’s worth working hard.”

Zak just shook his head and said, “Nah, I think I’d rather just be an astronaut.”

Just an astronaut, eh?!

Being a pastor *is* hard work, but, as I told Zak, it’s a good work, a beautiful work, a “noble task,” as St. Paul puts it (1 Tim. 3:1). Pastors bear an incredible burden of care for their congregations. Even though we are sinners, people rightly hold us to a higher standard of behavior, but it can be a difficult mantle to wear. It’s hard to bury your friends, there are always too many meetings, and I don’t know any preacher who enjoys church politics.

Nevertheless, the pastoral ministry is mostly full of joy. We get to witness the things that give God joy: repentant sinners turning to the cross, unbelievers coming to faith in Christ through Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel, and lifelong Christians finishing their course in faith. We are invited into people’s homes and hearts almost as part of the family, enjoying graduations, weddings, and other celebrations. People trust their pastors with their deepest fears and darkest secrets, allowing us to dispel the shadows with the light of Christ’s mercy and grace through private prayer and confession and absolution.

While every pastor probably has days when he thinks about calling it quits, the joy overcomes the frustration and sadness. I cannot imagine doing anything else for the Lord besides this noble task.

And yet fewer and fewer men head the call and entering into pastoral ministry. We have a big pastor shortage in our denomination, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). And we’re not the only ones. Across the country, Catholic and Protestant churches struggle to find pastors to fill their pulpits. Seminary enrollments have plummeted. To put this in perspective,

consider that when I began seminary in 2003, my incoming class of nearly 150 was the largest since the Seminex walkout in 1974. Over the past several years, the incoming classes have barely reached 60—just more than a third of the size of my class.

Pastors are retiring and dying faster than they're entering the ministry. And the average age of American pastors has gone up. In 1992, the average age of Protestant pastors in this country was 40. 25 years later, it was 54. According to research by the Barna Group, "Only one in seven pastors is under 40, and half are over 55... meaning there are now more pastors in the oldest age bracket than there are leaders younger than 40."²

So why do we have a pastor shortage? The answers are complex, but I think it boils down to three things. First, fewer young people go to church, period. There aren't that many Gen Xers or Millennials who are churchgoers anymore. You're more likely to see people my parents' and grandparents' age than my age in most American churches (not just the Lutheran ones). So there's a smaller pool of young Christians from which we can call pastors to be fishers of men.

The second reason there aren't enough pastors is because of the perceived lack of respect for pastors and priests. As recently as the mid-20th century, pastors and priests were esteemed and respected even by non-believers. People held the doors for pastors. They gave pastors closer parking spots at the hospital. Sometimes your collar could even get you out of a speeding ticket. Back then, people actually cared what men like Billy Graham and Fulton Sheen had to say about public affairs. Presidents sought their advice and private counsel.

But nowadays, according to a survey of the most respected professions, pastors rank just above car salesman.³ When you see depictions of clergy in the media, they appear either as a

² <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>

³ <https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>

dark, brooding psychopath, such as Ethan Hawke in *First Reformed* (2017), or as a bumbling idiot—think Robin Williams in *License to Wed* (2007). The only cool depiction of a guy in a collar that I can recall is Mel Gibson as the widower priest in M. Night Shyamalan’s science fiction horror film, *Signs* (2003). (At least *he* knew what to do when aliens invaded Iowa!)

But I think the *main* reason why we don’t have enough pastors is that we don’t *pray* for more pastors. But all that is about to change!

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus gives his disciples what I’d like to call The Other Lord’s Prayer. Most of us are familiar with the traditional Lord’s Prayer, also known as the Our Father. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name...” We pray the Our Father in our daily prayers and Sunday worship. But we don’t pay much attention to The Other Lord’s Prayer. Here it is: “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send our laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2b). Amen. That’s it! Jesus tells us to pray for more church workers: pastors, missionaries, teachers, DCEs, and lay evangelists. It may be short and simple, but it’s powerful. Jesus tells us what to pray for and gives us the words to say when we pray. Thus, The Other Lord’s Prayer.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. All around us people are ready to hear the Gospel of the kingdom, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Wherever you go in life, you encounter people who need to be saved. As Jesus told his disciples, “Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (John 4:35b).

But someone has to *tell* them for them to believe (cf. Rom. 10:14-17). God calls *all* believers into the mission field, but pastors have a special role. The Bible says that God gives pastors in order to equip and enable other Christians to do the work of ministry. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the

work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Pastors help to prepare the people of God to go into the harvest fields. We lead the charge. But who will lead if nobody answers the need?

The Church needs pastors, which is why Jesus calls men to the holy ministry and urges us to pray for more. “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Think of the pastors who made a special impact on your life. Maybe it was your childhood pastor who, like Jesus, welcomed you into his arms. Maybe he was your confirmation instructor or the pastor who married you after a series of marriage classes. Some people remember a pastor who was there for them in the darkest night of their soul—a deep depression, fight against addiction, or a terrible loss. Perhaps your beloved pastor has done nothing more than “be there” week in and week out, like a reliable, true, and trusty friend, baptizing infants in the faith, preaching the Word, loving the lost, and giving the dead a good send-off to Jesus. And if that is “all” he has done, it is enough, because God gave you a pastor so that you could hear and believe on the Lord Jesus—and be saved.

We need more men who will do that. So keep an eye out for boys and men in our congregation who may be fit to serve someday. You’re never too old or too young to think about the ministry. When I was a student at the St. Louis seminary, more than half my classmates were in their 40’s and 50’s. Not every newly minted pastor is a 25-year-old “kid”! Encourage the Christian men in your life to consider the call and ask me questions. And, above all, pray The Other Lord’s Prayer! “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). I promise you: God will answer. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.