

Stories about Ministers and Ministry

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Pastor Dr. Eric Peterson

Last month I celebrated the 50th anniversary of my ordination into the pastoral ministry. I was ordained at Grace Lutheran Church in Queens Village, New York on June 6, 1971. (See photo on screen). God's call to be His minister however came much earlier. It came when I was baptized. You too were called by God when you were baptized. In baptism, God forgave your sins and He also gave you the Holy Spirit so you could forgive the sins of others. Everyone in the Church is a minister. Peter put it this way, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Today's Gospel is one of many stories in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Mark about ministers and ministry. These stories help us to understand the challenges and joys of being in ministry with Jesus. The first story is about Jesus' visit to His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus' neighbors knew Him as the carpenter's son. So when Jesus came with His disciples and wanted to minister to them, they took offense. How could this man, who fixed my front door, or put on the extension to my house, be in ministry? The people struggled to believe how God could use ordinary people for His purposes. We struggle with this too. Who feels qualified to be a minister?

Moses said he couldn't speak. Jeremiah complained he was too young. Isaiah said he was too sinful. If you feel unqualified to be on God's ministry team, congratulations, you fit right in. The Apostle Paul described the Church this way and it is not very flattering: "Brothers (sisters), think about what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise, by human standards, not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of

the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:26-29). The disciples accomplished great things, not because of who they were, but because of who God is. The ministry Jesus gave to the disciples now belongs to you. God has called you to bring God’s healing to the brokenness of the world.

The second ministry story is about Jesus sending the disciples out to be in ministry. This morning we are going to have our own sending ceremony for a group of young people who are going on a servant event. We want each of you to know how proud we are of you, and your willingness to give up your time this summer to help others. But as you get ready to go to this servant event, listen to Jesus’ advice. “Take nothing for the journey except a staff...no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.” Normally, when we pack for a trip, we want to make sure we bring everything we need. We do not want to forget anything. Therefore, Jesus’ instructions sound a little confusing. What Jesus is saying is that if we want to be a blessing to others, we need to trust in Him and not in what we have or trust in ourselves. The only comfort or hope we have to offer people is the comfort and hope God has given to us in Jesus Christ. And the power to transform lives comes from Him and not from ourselves.

This brings us to the third ministry story about John the Baptist. Jesus said that John was the greatest prophet because, unlike other prophets who talked about God’s promise to send a Savior, John declared that He was here. John prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry by declaring, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John’s execution by King Herod also foreshadowed Jesus’ death on the cross. His life demonstrated that ministry has a cost. The world is filled with suffering. If we are going to make a difference in the world, we have to be willing to suffer ourselves. We have to be willing to make sacrifices. Jesus put it this way, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and

follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it“ (Luke 9:23-24). This is God’s promise to us. If we lose our life for Him, we will find it. It may seem impossible, but God makes the impossible, possible. Imagine what great things would happen if we would yield our lives to do the will of God like these young people are doing this morning? Imagine what great things might happen if we would change our focus from what we want from God to what God wants to do through us?

This brings us to the fourth story which is about the joy and the excitement that the disciples experienced in their ministry. They came back to Jesus filled with amazement because of the lives that were changed and the people who were blessed. They discovered that ministry is where the joy is.

When I was preparing this sermon, I was made aware of the terrible suffering that is taking place in Haiti and to the children in the orphanage our church supports. The political situation in Haiti has reached a point of collapse. Gangs of heavily armed men are ravaging whole communities. This week the president of Haiti was assassinated. Last week, I was talking with Dr. Franco, the founder of the “Go-Haiti” mission. He shared with me that the violence in the community around the orphanage threatened the children’s lives. Nine people were killed on the street outside the orphanage and armed men demanded money from the staff for protection. For the safety of the children, the staff had to act quickly to move the children to a safer location in the mountains. By the grace of God, they found shelter in a small mountain village, away from the violence. Temporarily, the children are sleeping in a local school until a leased storage building can be renovated for the children and staff to live in. Gratefully the children are safe, however, their lives are far from easy. They have no well for water, no plumbing, no secure supply of food, they have few clothes and necessities and there are limited funds. Bill Pfancuff, Joe Carlin, and others in our congregation have been working on a plan to rebuild the orphanage in this new location. The plan has three phases and will take time and cost

between one hundred and thirty and two hundred thousand dollars to complete.

I invite you to join me by making the “Go-Haiti Mission” your own. Keep it in your prayers. Talk to the volunteers in the narthex today, who have served in this mission, and find out how you can get involved. Share the need for the orphanage on your Facebook page and invite your friends and family to get involved. Most importantly, make a financial gift today. You can use your cell phone and the QR Code in the bulletin or write a check to OSWLC and put in the designation line “Go-Haiti Mission.” Whatever you do, please do not take the money you would give to OSWLC or another mission and give it to this mission. This would not be helpful to the work of our church. You are chosen, you belong to God, You are Holy in His sight, and you are equipped with His Spirit for ministry. May God bless you and may He bless the ministry He has given you.