

“Pastors wanted! Great reward!” Matthew 9:9-13

“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today the Church remembers the call of Matthew, the tax collector, the inspired author of the first book in the New Testament, the Gospel according to Matthew. Pastor Timothy Teuscher, president of the Lutheran Church-Canada, encouraged us to use this day for an advertisement. For a very particular advertisement.

This is what we are going to do today - we will reflect on two beautiful Biblical teachings. They are inseparable, they are complementary, they are like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, both together making up one whole, both different, both necessary.

First is the teaching on **the priesthood of all the baptized**. The second is teaching on **the Office of the Holy Ministry**. And then we will have **a little time for that advertisement**. Priesthood of all the baptised, the Office of the Holy Ministry, and then the advertisement.

First, the priesthood of all the baptized. What is that? That is how the apostles speak about the Church, about all Christians. They call us royal priesthood, chosen race, holy nation, priests to our God (1 Pet 2:9, Rev 1:6 5:10, 20:6). Why would they use such language and what does that mean?

As the Scripture teaches us, Jesus Christ is our High Priest. [1] As our High Priest He has access to God the Father and He prays for us. [2] As our High Priest He delivered the ultimate sacrifice – He sacrificed Himself - for the sin of the world, to atone for all our sins. [3] As our High Priest, Jesus brings us the Good News of God’s forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Yes, fine, but that is all about Jesus! What about us?

In our baptism we are united with Jesus, our High Priest, we are made His brothers and sisters, we are made royal priesthood together with Him. And now, because we are baptized and adopted in God’s family, [1] we too have access to God our Father.

We too can pray for those who don’t have such access to God, for those who are far from Him. You may have witnessed this in your own life, when non-Christians ask Christians: “Can you pray for me?” They know in their guts, that Christians do have a unique access to Someone, they don’t.

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[2] Because we are made royal priests, we also bring our sacrifices to our God. Not to atone for our sins, Jesus has done that, we bring sacrifices of thanksgiving, living sacrifices of our lives as we give them to the Lord in service to our neighbours.

[3] As royal priests we too bring Good News as we “**proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light**” to all people whom He has placed in our lives, beginning with our families, workplaces, friends, etc.

This is what the apostles meant when they spoke about royal priesthood. Magnificent gifts and privileges, great responsibilities! Thanks be to God! But... our all-wise Lord also knew that the royal priesthood cannot exist and be fruitful on its own.

How come? We live in this sinful world. Our hearts are twisted and selfish, instead of looking out for unity, peace and harmony of faith, we tend to elevate ourselves and our own interests above those of others. Besides, “**the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**”, seeking to destroy God’s people. (1 Pet 5:8)

And as Jesus and the apostles warned us many times, from our midst, from among us [!] will rise those who draw away Christians after them. Yes! false teachers and enemies of the Gospel will be a constant threat to every community of God’s people.

If the royal priesthood, the sheep belonging to the Good Shepherd, were left alone, they would quickly become prey to divisions, personal ambitions and fierce wolves who come cunningly hiding under sheep’s clothing. Yet, they are thieves who come “**only to steal and kill and destroy**.” (John 10:10)

Knowing this, out of His great love and care the Lord of the Church gives us another gift. And this is where we come **to the second** of these teachings, **the teaching on the Office of the Holy Ministry**. What is that about?

Different words are used in the New Testament to describe this gift – bishops, which means overseers, shepherds, elders, teachers. In the Lutheran Church we usually call this gift - the Office of the Holy Ministry, or simply - Pastors.

What is this gift about? Let’s see. Now, how is the Church created, how is the Church sustained and fed? By the Word and the Spirit. Yes, by the life-giving Word and the Spirit of life. Dr Luther used to call the Church the creature of the Word.

“**Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**” (Rom 10:17)

The enemy knows how the Lord creates and feeds His Church. That is why the enemy first attacks the pure teaching and preaching of the Word of God for that is how he can cut the lifeline of the Church.

That is exactly why the Good Shepherd gives us this another gift - His servants, His under-shepherds, those who are stewards of the mysteries of God, those who are called and entrusted to feed the sheep and protect them from wolves.

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That is how the focus and the purpose of the Office of the Holy Ministry, the Office of Pastors is defined by the Lord. And the Good Shepherd gives very specific instructions for those men who would match His qualifications to be His under-shepherds.

The office of overseers, or Pastors, involves headship characterized by loving concern for those under his spiritual care (1 Tim 3:4–5). That's why Dr Luther speaks about Pastors as spiritual fathers for those under their care.

Thus, according to the Scriptures, Pastors “**must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that they may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it**” (Titus 1:6–9).

From this we can highlight three responsibilities for Pastors: first is the *preservation* of the sure Word of God, second is the *instruction* with the Word of God, and third is the *defense* of the Word of God. For, as we say in our confession, wherever “**the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered**”, there is the Church. (AC VII) That's where she grows and flourishes.

Just think about this - what if God's message is not *preserved* in its truth and purity? It is quickly lost. In one generation. We know that the Holy Spirit only accompanies the Word of God, not false teachings or our ideas. That's why preserving the truth of God's message is so important; our faith and salvation depend on it.

Or, what if we are not *instructed or catechised* in the Word? Do we know God's revelation by ourselves? Can we just figure out what the Bible teaches on our own? Good luck, that's how new sects and sectarian groups emerge. For they don't want to be instructed, they don't want the unity of faith, they think they know better...

And what if the Word of God is not *defended* against false teachers and wolves in sheep's clothing? Disunity leads to divisions. The flock is scattered; the sheep are deceived and led astray for spiritual slaughter.

That is why Jesus has given His beloved Bride, the Church, the Office of the Holy Ministry; she would suffer and be lost without faithful under-shepherds. It is for this reason that the Scriptures call this office of pastors “**a noble task**” “**worthy of double honor**”, something to be “**esteem very highly in love because of their work**”. (1 Tim 3:1, 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12– 13). Because of how essential this office of Pastors is for the life, wellbeing and flourishing of Christ's Church.

Now we have come to our advertisement part. Pastors are God's gift to His Church, God's will for His Church. Pastors are needed. Pastors are necessary. However, even if called noble, worthy, esteemed, and so on, this calling still comes with its challenges.

Let us be honest. Pastors are human beings. Fallen and imperfect human beings. As everyone else, they want to be liked, accepted, appreciated and so they want to please people, but the Lord says that one thing is required from them, that they are found faithful to Him and His Word, no matter what the cost. It is Christ and Him alone who determines the content of their message and the shape of Pastors' ministry.

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Pastors and their families are usually the first to have the enemy's target on their back, they are tempted, tested, their weaknesses exploited, often more than they can bear, yet, during those most difficult times they also get to experience God's presence like almost no one else. Pastors are often looked down upon by the world and their own families and friends, yet they are great in the eyes of the Lord of the Church, greatly valued, esteemed and embraced by the Good Shepherd.

Pastors are often despised even by those they are sent to serve, treated like hired hands, yet with their mouths and hands they distribute to God's people His most precious gifts - God's forgiveness, life and salvation.

Pastors often witness the indifference towards the Word of God among those they are sent to serve, their hearts break seeing the disdain towards the most beautiful news, the Gospel, yet they are called to joyfully immerse themselves daily in the studies of the Word, that life-giving treasure, so that they are fit for their calling.

Pastors strive to be faithful, toiling to learn and preserve God's message, looking for opportunities to preach, teach and instruct even those with itching ears, trying to stand firm, even when they are fearful, weak and vulnerable.

Faithful Pastors are often attacked by the wolves in sheep's clothing, and, sadly, kicked and punched by the deceived and confused sheep they are called to protect. Yet, their divine calling gives Pastors an unshakable foundation to stand on, not on their own, but in the stead and in the strength of the Lord.

So, who would desire this Office of Pastors?

Yet, they are wanted, they are needed, and the reward is great! There is a reason why the Scripture says: "**Those who turn many to righteousness, [will shine] like the stars forever and ever.**" (Dan 12:3)

Is there anyone ready or good enough for this calling? No! Matthew the tax collector wasn't, neither was any of the apostles, neither was any of the countless servants of the Word whom the Lord has called to serve His people. But the One who calls also provides everything His servants may need. That we can be certain of.

So... what shall we do? This is what our Seminaries encourage us to do.

Pray. As Christ urged His disciples, we shall all pray that God provides more workers for His kingdom work. Then, **identify.** Look around for men that you think have the potential to be trained as Pastors, whether they are still youth, young adults, or mid-career. Then **encourage** them. Approach these fellow saints to affirm them in the gifts and character that you see in them, tell them about this divine calling – Christ's under-shepherds, and encourage that they talk to your Pastor.

The Bride of Christ needs Pastors. We all need them. They are wanted! And the reward is great!

Amen.