**The Office of the Holy Ministry**

Based on [Matthew 9:35-10:20](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt9.35-10.20)

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Today’s Gospel lesson is about Jesus’ sending or “calling” of the twelve disciples to do two things, to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and heal every disease. And the account shows us three things about the form of what we call the office of the holy ministry, “the office” for short. First, it shows us that one enters into the office through a divine call. Second, it shows us that the functions of the office are to proclaim and to heal, to teach and to serve. Third, the gospel shows that the success of the ministry is in God’s hands, not in the skill or power of men.

First, One enters into the office of the Holy Ministry through a divine call. The gospel begins with Jesus teaching and healing and having compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he tells his disciples that these harassed and helpless crowds need men to help them, to “labour” for them. Jesus first recognizes the need for men to help shepherd his church, to lead his sheep, because “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”

Here, Jesus notices for his disciples that there is a difference between sheep and shepherds, and this is by his own command. Jesus in effect says, let there be shepherds for my harassed and helpless sheep. And the scripture says, “**And he CALLED to him his twelve disciples and GAVE THEM AUTHORITY over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction**.” He called them and he gave them authority.

This is how God does call and has always called men into the office of the holy ministry. It is He Himself who calls them and gives them authority. Under the Old Testament, God called priests and gave them authority. And anyone who would seize that authority for themselves would suffer His condemnation. Priests held the office under the old covenant, Pastors today under the new. And while it doesn’t really matter how the church decides to call pastors, once the church does so we know that that man has been called into the office of the holy ministry and has been given by God that role and relationship to his sheep.

St Paul says to the pastors in Ephesus, “**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood**” (Acts 20:28). St. Paul is speaking to men that were not directly called by Jesus, as the apostles were, but nevertheless Paul asserts that the Holy Spirit made these men overseers of Christ’s church. And he goes on to warn them about false men who will try to teach in the church without having been called by the Holy Spirit. They are wolves and under the condemnation of God. So the Confessions of our Lutheran Churches say, “No one should publically teach in the church or administer the sacraments without a rightly ordered call” (Augsburg Confession Article 14). Because God is a God of order, not chaos, and he is the one who calls qualified men into the office of the holy ministry.

*And a man who holds this office by the Holy Spirit is of no greater status or worth before God or men. It is simply a calling, as others have their calling in this life to be parents, bosses, workers, students, children, and to fulfill these callings in God’s name and according to God’s will. And in the church, those who do not have the office of preaching do have a great responsibility that elsewhere Jesus calls the “greater portion.” The sheep are not to teach and minister in the church, they are to hear and to receive in the church.*

First a man enters the office through a divine call--that is, through God’s own choosing. Second, this gospel shows us that the functions of the office are to proclaim and to heal, that is to “teach” and to “serve.” “**These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And PROCLAIM as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand. HEAL the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.”**

The office of the Holy Ministry hasn’t always had the same content, but it always has the same form. For instance, the content of ministry for the twelve was to simply proclaim the coming kingdom, and to serve by way of miraculous signs…healing, raising, cleansing, and casting out demons. The office of the ministry for Pastor’s today has no such content. Pastors pray for the sick and bless them, but so do all Christians. But they have not been given authority to heal diseases. But the form is the same, and is always the same to teach and to serve. And the service that ministers have authority for in the church today is to preach and administer the sacraments.

And the content of the teaching wasn’t always the same. The Old Testament priests were to “teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses.” That includes what foods are clean and unclean; what sacrifices need to be offered, which ceremonies and festival days must be observed according to the Law given to Moses on Sinai. The ministers of the New Testament do not teach these things. Rather they are called to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and teach all that Jesus has commanded. Different content, but the same form and in that way one and the same ministry from God to his people through a minister.

Third, the gospel teaches that the success of the ministry is in God’s hands, not in the skill or power of men. When God called Moses, Moses responded that he was not an eloquent speaker. God said, “I am the one who made your mouth, I know, and I will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:10-12). And he tells his twelve disciples, “**Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.**”

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things” (2 Cor. 11:16).

Brothers and sisters, doesn’t this just fly in the face of the world’s obsession with eloquence and entertainment? Some Pastors fill their sermons with jokes and anecdotes and make people laugh; they tell sad stories and make them weep, and people praise the pastor for his great sermon. And yet you ask them what he taught them and they couldn’t tell you, but they could tell you the joke, or the sad story.

But a Pastor gets up and speaks only God’s teaching and people leave saying “**I didn’t get anything out of church today**.” “**I’m not getting fed.”** Brothers and sisters know this. If you travelled over land and sea to attend worship, and the pastor only read to you one passage from scripture, you will have been given something from God worth more than your home and all your possessions that moth and rust decay and will burn away in the day of judgment. If all you receive is the body and blood of Christ, God has given you a gift that if you believe it would make you laugh with delight and weep for joy, his forgiveness for your many sins. And it is not God’s fault if you don’t receive it, it is your own hardness of heart. But to you who do receive it, you have more than a new joke in your quiver, you have eternal life, because you are worthy of it by faith, by simple hearing and believing.

Jesus says to the twelve, “**Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.**

Here is the measure of success of the office of the holy ministry. Ministers do not make sheep for God’s fold. God’s sheep are out there, scattered to the four corners of the earth. Ministers are not called to make sheep, they are to call God’s sheep to him and thereby make disciples. He tells the twelve, “whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.”God’s sheep are out there, they are not to be made, only found.

And God’s sheep, his elect, are found not when you tell jokes and charm them to you, and make them trust in you and impressed by your charisma. They speak with a different voice, a stranger’s voice and Christ says, “**My sheep hear my voice…a stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers**” (John 10:5). God’s sheep simply want to hear God’s pure Word, not tainted by rhetoric or eloquent speech or worldly wisdom. So ministers, office holders, are called simply to preach the pure word, and the worthy are “found” because they respond to the word in faith, in hearing the word they say “Amen” and mean it.

St. Paul says of his own proclamation, “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4). *By the open statement of the truth*…there it is, there is how the ministry discovers the worthy.

And this is how you should view your faith. When the word of God is spoken to me do I believe it, and say Amen. If not, don’t blame the messenger. Seek understanding from God’s word. But if you do hear it, and believe it you have eternal life. As sure as the sun is risen today, so has Christ risen from the dead and sent His Holy Spirit into the world through the office of the Holy Ministry to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify his sheep on earth, until he comes again from heaven to take you to where he is.

Three things are shown in Jesus’ calling of the twelve. First, God calls ministers through a rightly ordered call. Second, although the content of the ministry changes between the Old and New Testament, the form is the same. All ministers are called to proclaim and minister, to teach and to serve according to God’s instruction. Finally, we do not measure the success of God’s church because God’s church is always successful. The church and her ministers are not called to make sheep, but to make disciples of sheep, baptizing them and teaching them all that Christ has commanded. And not by words of eloquent wisdom, but by the open statement of the truth God will reveal who is worthy in those who receive it with assurance and joy.

You have heard such an open statement today, believe it, receive it you who are worthy, you have been fed and satisfied not by a man, but by the pure proclamation of the word of God.