

# “Entrusted to God”

## 3rd Sunday after Pentecost—Farewell Sermon

Acts 20:17-22, 32-36

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” Acts 20:32

The date was July 31, 2011. The time was approximately 3:45pm in the afternoon. The place was this sanctuary. It was my ordination and installation service here at Atonement Lutheran. Many of you were in attendance. It was a memorable day for me and my family and for all of you. A former professor of mine at Concordia University, Ann Arbor even made a cross stich with the appropriate information to commemorate the event.

During the first part of the service the rite of ordination was performed. I was ordained into the Pastoral Ministry by the District President of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. The congregation heard what Holy Scripture says concerning the institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry and its responsibilities. I made vows before God and the congregation to uphold the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the three Ecumenical Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions. I promised to faithfully perform the duties of preaching, teaching, and visitation of the sick and homebound. And then a red stole was placed upon me symbolizing my entrance into the Office of the Holy Ministry (“Rite of Ordination” from *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, pp. 160-168).

Immediately following the rite of ordination I was installed as the Pastor of Atonement. During that installation rite you all, the congregation, was asked if you will honor and uphold the pastor as he serves. You were asked if you will aid him as he cares for his family. You were asked if you will be diligent to “put the best construction on everything,” recognizing that “love covers a multitude of sins.” And then you all, together as a congregation, responded with the words, “We will, with the help of God.” I was asked if I am ready and willing to assume this public trust and responsibility. I responded with the words, “I am.” And then I was installed as the Pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church, Spring Valley, CA. (“Rite of Installation of the Pastor of a Congregation at Ordination” from *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, pp. 169-170). The day was July 31, 2011. The time was shortly before 4:00pm in the afternoon.

I call to mind my ordination and installation service not only to end as I began here at Atonement, but also to remind us all of a word and concept that is highlighted not only during a rite of ordination and installation for a Pastor but is also highlighted in Paul’s farewell words to the Ephesian elders in our epistle lesson that we heard this morning. That word or concept is “entrust.”

To be entrusted to care for something or someone is to be given a great responsibility. It is a privilege, joy, and an honor to be entrusted with the care of a child, for instance. During the service of installation

of a Pastor at a congregation God entrusts a Pastor and his family to a congregation. God also entrusts a congregation, his people, to a Pastor. It is a privilege, joy, and honor. It is a great responsibility for the congregation and the Pastor. And so Pastors and congregations are wise to carry out this responsibility in continual prayer.

During our epistle reading from the Book of Acts we listen in on a farewell conversation the Apostle Paul is having with the elders or leaders of the Church in Ephesus. During that conversation he says these words to them, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

The word "commend" is a translation of a Greek word that can also mean "entrust." In the New Testament the Apostle Paul uses this word when he speaks to his fellow Pastor and co-worker Timothy and reminds him that he is entrusted with God's people and God's Word as a Pastor (1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:2). Jesus speaks this word when he entrusts his Spirit to the Heavenly Father as he utters some of his final words on the cross (Luke 23:46). And then the Apostles Paul and Peter use this word in the New Testament in our reading and elsewhere to speak of commending God's people to God (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:32; 1 Peter 4:19). We learn from tracing the usage of this Greek word in the New Testament that even though all of us as God's people are entrusted with various responsibilities that come with the particular vocations that God has given to us, first and foremost we are entrusted to the care of our God. We are his and he is ours. We are his people and he is our God.

And so at the end of his Ministry to the congregation in the city of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul uses this Greek word that is often translated "entrust." And in using this word he entrusts the people back to God and to his word of grace. They are no longer in Paul's care anymore. God has another under-shepherd and overseer in mind to care for them, lead them, and feed them. And just as we give back what is on loan to us, Paul effectively gives back the people that God has entrusted to him and his care. And Paul reminds the elders of the Ephesian Church that God and his Word of grace has the power and ability to truly care for his people. God and his Word of grace has the power and ability to build up, to make holy, and to give and guarantee an eternal inheritance (Acts 20:32). Wonderful blessings. Wonderful gifts.

And so I entrust you to our God and his Word of grace. To be sure, it is hard to leave those that one has grown to love to face an uncertain future. But we will do it the same way Paul did it: "And now I entrust you to God and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance which goes to all who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). God builds his Church through his Pastors that he calls through his Call process. Through his Word that he gives a Pastor to speak God admonishes the erring, forgives the sinner, comforts the fainthearted, and supports the suffering. Through a Pastor he gives Jesus to his people. Through a Pastor he delivers to you the forgiveness Jesus purchased on Calvary in Word and Sacrament. God did these things at Atonement long before I arrived. He continued to do them while I was privileged to serve all of you for four years. And now, we can rest assured that God will continue to give to you Jesus and the eternal gifts he purchased for you. For this is what God does for

the people with whom he is entrusted. This is how he builds them up. This is how he keeps them holy. This is how he makes sure they will be entrusted with the eternal inheritance now and forever.

We read at the end of Paul's farewell speech, "When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all" (Acts 20:36). Let us pray . . . Amen.