

Ordination of Paul Doellinger
St. Paul Lutheran Church

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Cassopolis, MI

+Jesus Juva+

In the Service of a Word That Stands Forever
Isaiah 40:8

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” said the Psalmist, “and “by the breath of his mouth all their hosts” (Ps. 33:6). But we live in a world that is distrustful of words. Words are said to be slippery; only so much talk reduced to hot air. We want action, not words. Or as one cliché puts it, “walk the walk, don’t talk the talk.”

We are here this afternoon because words do matter. It is on account of words that your pastor-elect, Paul Doellinger sits here in front of us. Like Timothy of old, from childhood he has known the Holy Scriptures which made him wise to salvation. His parents brought him to the font where words joined to water were spoken over him, forgiving him his sin and endowing him with the Holy Spirit. His mother and father brought him to the services of God’s house and as he grew in years they placed into his hands the Holy Scriptures, teaching him the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. His pastors taught him the Catechism and faith was enlivened and solidified. It continued at Ann Arbor and at Fort Wayne with the study of Hebrew and Greek, more Scripture and God’s doctrine deepening in him the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and the desire to pursue what the Apostle calls “the noble task” of being a bishop, an overseer of God’s flock. Words, Paul, have brought you to this time and place. For the way the words of God have been at work in your life through your parents and family, through pastors and teachers, we give thanks to God.

Today, we are here to ordain Paul Doellinger. That is his life will now be bound to the Word of God as a preacher. In a few minutes your pastor-elect will make some vows, some solemn promises. He will confess his allegiance to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. He will confess the Creeds as faithful testimonies to the truth of Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as the true exposition of the Scriptures. He will promise to continue to study these Scriptures and Confessions, to teach them to young and old, and to perform all the duties of his office in conformity with them. Your pastor is not a servant to his own opinion and assessment of things but to the Word of His Lord. Both he and you will be reminded of that every time he speaks to you as a “called and ordained servant of the Word.”

This bed-rock fact gives comfort to both the congregation and the pastor. To you hearers of God’s Word here in St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, you are given the assurance that your pastor is put here to speak is not his own words but the Word of the Lord that stands forever. You have a pastor who will not trim the Scriptures to fit his own agenda but instead will stand under those Scriptures to proclaim to you the living Word of the Lord. You can count on that!

My brother Paul, today Christ Jesus is making you a servant of His Word. You have prepared for this day through careful study and prayer. You have been examined and declared ready in

doctrine and fit in life to assume this office. Through the call of this Christian congregation, God Himself has called you to this place. Days, months and even years of anticipation are brought to fulfillment as now you are ordained into the office of the Holy Ministry. But the joy and excitement of this festive day dare not blind you to the cross that is laid upon you. All Christians in one way or another are given a cross to bear. Pastors are not exempt from life under the cross. The very Word you proclaim will bring you suffering for as Luther puts it where the holy and precious Gospel is proclaimed there the holy cross will follow. Sometimes the imprint of the cross is very public; most times it is private, born in silence and secrecy. Sometimes the cross takes the form of persecution, ridicule and rejection. The lives of prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament are eloquent but bloody reminders of that. But the cross that pastors bear also takes other shapes such as the agony that comes when Gospel is heard but not believed; when the cares and concerns of this life choke and strangle faith in the lives of people under his care.

But as you are yoked with the office, you have a sure and sturdy promise. Listen again to our text for Isaiah: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Without God’s Word, the ministry is nothing. In fact, there would be no ministry and no need for pastors. The office exists for the sake of the Word and it is that Word which will comfort and sustain you.

The very Word which you preach, the Word of the cross – the Word that is foolishness to those who are perishing but the very power of God to those who are being saved- is ultimately the only thing you have to offer your hearers for the forgiveness of their sins, for their life and peace. This is the Word which carries the Spirit who works to create faith in the hearts of those who hear it when and where it pleases Him. This is the Word that does not return to God empty but accomplishes His purpose. This is the Word that you are given to preach with undying patience, in season and out of season. This is the Word that the Apostle declares is not bound, but has free course. Heaven and earth will pass away but this Word endures forever. This Word is nothing less than the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. His words say what they do, and do what they say. Preaching not yourself, but Him, you have courage and confidence, to step into the office today knowing the outcome of your work is in His nail pierced hands. You have the promise of His empty tomb, that your work in His name is not futile or in vain. You have the promise of the One who says “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” The victory of our crucified and risen Lord over sin and unbelief gives you the boldness to preach, to recklessly sow the seed of the Gospel whether men like or like it not, to paraphrase the words of the hymn-writer, for that Word shall endure and stand when flowers and men shall be forgot.

When God makes a promise, He takes on the responsibility to fulfill it. He promises to be with you, Brother Paul, to use your mouth as His mouth, your hands as His hands. So go the work the Lord is today giving you as one whose trust is in the promise which will not disappoint: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” What more do you need than that? Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless