

Under the light of the Gospel, no title bestowed should give anyone more pause than being given the name, “Pastor.” For it comes to men from Christ himself, the Good Shepherd. Nor is it merely that he allows others to use the same title; rather, when Jesus confers the name of *Pastor*, he is placing that person under his authority, in order to do through him the work that only the Son of God himself do. In other words, it is God’s desire and intention to shepherd his flock through the actions of mere men – who, obvious as it is to anyone who takes one look at us – need all the help he can give!

How fitting, then, that today’s Rite of Installation falls on Laetare, for which the traditionally appointed Gospel is John 6, where Jesus reveals himself as the Good Shepherd. Yes, I know: It is not until the tenth chapter that Christ actually speaks the words, “I am the Good Shepherd.” But make no mistake: Even in such subtle ways as mentioning the green grass where the people sat down, the evangelist is hearkening back to the twenty-third Psalm. More significantly, however, it is in this day’s pericope that God’s Son does what all Good Shepherds do: He feeds.

Therefore, we can say that, whatever the details are that define the duties of Daniel Metzger to Grace & Trinity congregations, through the expressed wish of the sheep the Holy Spirit has called this man to feed them. Feed them what? God’s Word. Now, as the Catechism poses the question, which is that word of God?

To read on in John 6 beyond verse ten is to hear a sermon filled with riches. For to the 5,000 whom Christ has gathered and already fed with bread and fish, he then declares, “What I have really come to feed you is me, me in my very own flesh and blood, which I give for the life of the world!” And as soon as he utters that statement, practically everybody looks at his watch, coughs, and says, “Oh, it looks like we should be getting home.” For they came to receive some spiritual enlightenment, but not anything that radical! They came to hear this Jesus, to check him out, perhaps to be inspired. “I am the bread of life... I am manna sent from heaven to save you from death?” They leave in droves.

But not you. Here you are on a late Sunday afternoon. You are not here because you are curious, or merely because you wish to honor and support Daniel Metzger. You are here because you understand, like Simon Peter, that there’s nowhere else to go if what you seek is truly life. Jesus is the manna from heaven without whom we perish. And we understand that the apostolic office of the public ministry is really all about Christ himself shepherding his people through the actions of his servants.

When he who is the Bread of Life tells the apostles, “Go... and baptize,” he means, “Go and drown them in my life-saving, sin-forgiving death.” When he says, “Forgive their sins,” he means, “Set them free, not in your name or in the power of your blood, but in mine.” When he says, “Go and preach,” he means “repentance and forgiveness in my name.” His promise over the Bread and Cup that we bless is that He is our feast, both the victim and the priest.

Because it is not Geoffrey Boyle who died for life of the world, or Dan Metzger who builds the Church, but Christ alone. Of course, as everybody is aware the man being installed comes to this parish to serve in a part-time position. I have news for you: There are no part-time pastors. Like the deep black dye in a new clerical shirt, the vows that this man once spoke, and the blessings God placed on him, have soaked into the skin of the Rev. Daniel Metzger. Seven days a week there lives in him a love for God's flock and the humble desire to feed it in Jesus' name.

Of the many things I know about Brother Dan – and there are at least a few that I can include in a sermon, one is the seriousness with which he, under the authority of his call, always accepts the assignment to preach God's Word. In an age when churches heed the advice of marketing experts, we are always finding out just how much things can change, and how far they yet can go. Fifteen years ago Jeanne Kilde, after studying just the course of church architecture in the 1800s, published her findings in a book whose title almost says it all: *When Church Became Theater*.

Pastor Metzger's call to this parish should remind us that what God's sheep need is to be fed, not entertained. Without Christ the pastor is nothing and has nothing to offer that helps. And so the Chief Shepherd commands him, "When you get in the pulpit, forget who you are and give them me."

For this to take place consistently, the man must always be doing three things: diligently studying the Scriptures, praying to the Lord for mercy, and getting to know and understand the souls whose health it is he is called to serve. In the days surrounding a pastor's installation everybody puts on their good face and seeks to charm and impress. The sooner we can all be honest with each other the better. For we are all weak to the point of helpless without God's Holy Spirit. There is no damage the Foe can do in the world that he cannot do within a congregation.

Sometimes the flock must rise up and defend its pastor. Sometimes the pastor is the only one defending his flock. Sometimes it's important to remember, "He's ordained to the apostolic office of the public ministry, and I'm not." Quite often, however, it's more important to remember this about your pastor: "I am nothing but a dying sinner whom Christ has rescued and forgiven – and so is he."

And here he is. And here are Trinity and Grace congregations. Once called to serve Immanuel on South Market, Pastor Metzger now comes to South Erie. For some reason the Lord has kept him inside a narrow box defined by Kellogg on the North and Lincoln on the south, Woodlawn on the east and the river on the west. So often what the Missouri Synod does best is to take up its cross and follow the realtors. But here are Grace and Trinity, their sister Bethany, and Mother Immanuel.

And here are found all the riches of Christ given by the Lord himself to be preached and poured, eaten and drunk, heard and received. Here anyone may find the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. And this remains true despite all the times when, and the ways in which, we Missouri Synod Lutherans have sought to

trade in our birthright for a bowl of stew. Rejoice in how by the power of God's mercy we still have these things, and that by having them in common we also have each other. Pastor... Sheep.. Jesus Christ... it doesn't get any better than this. ☩