

Holy Trinity Sunday A 2017, June 11, 2017, 35<sup>th</sup> Ordination Anniversary for Pr. Ken Jetto, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt Strause

It is both an honor and a privilege for me to preach this morning on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination for my pastoral colleague and good friend Pastor Ken Jetto. We have known each other for just about that length of time, although my wife Lois and Ken will point out they have been friends even longer. Lois and Ken first met each other in seminary at Gettysburg but really got to know each other when they were both students in Washington, DC at what was then known as the Lutheran House of Studies. The Lutheran House of Studies gave students from Gettysburg the opportunity to live and take classes in any of the theological schools in the nation's capital. I too was a student at Gettysburg and the Lutheran House of Studies, but not at the same time. You see, I'm much younger than Ken and Lois. Lois was already graduated from seminary and working for the Lutheran Church of the Reformation on Capitol Hill, and Ken, I believe was serving his internship so he and I were never on campus at the same time. Nevertheless, we've been friends and colleagues for quite some time, and most especially when Ken and Ellen made the move to Lititz a number of years ago, and our friendship between the four of us has only grown deeper. Ken and I have also participated in a yearly retreat of clergy in a society begun when we were first became pastors. This small society looks to one of the early church fathers, Gregory Nazianzus, or Gregory the Theologian, as he is also known. St. Gregory, along with Basil the Great and another Gregory, of Nyssa, are known for helping the church to be clear and precise in its understanding of the triune God; Father, Son, and Spirit. One God, known in three persons, yet one, undivided God. Yes, it is a privilege to call Pastor Jetto my friend and pastoral colleague. Whose only flaw, as nearly as I can tell, is that he roots for the New York Yankees, which causes me to signal my own commitment during the summer.

Ken Jetto was ordained on April 13, 1954. This fact does not make him a child prodigy, though it does make him a child of God. On the day Ken was baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as was said in those days, Ken was ordained into the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers is the first, and indeed foundational, ordination for the Christian church. We are, as the apostle Peter writes, "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) This dual promise and command belongs to the whole people of God, to the whole church, and not just to a select few. We are a chosen, royal priesthood. That's the promise of Christ choosing us in baptism, making us children, making us his own. We are also commissioned with a task; commanded to "proclaim the mighty acts" of God to the whole world. Everyone who is baptized is ordained into this ministry, this priesthood that is common to us all. And though there may be different talents and abilities given to individuals within the church, each exists within this one common priesthood which we all share.

From within this common priesthood God calls some to serve the church in a unique and public way. In the Lutheran church we call this the office of Pastor, or the office of Word and Sacrament; in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Orthodox churches it's often referred to as the Christian priesthood; in other Protestant churches it might be known as pastor, minister or even preacher. And though there may be theological and ecclesial nuanced differences in terminology the meaning is essentially the same. God has determined that there needs to be individuals in the church who are given the task of preaching the Word of God and administering the holy sacraments in order to build up and give you, the priesthood of all believers, the strength, tools

and encouragement to do what God wants you to do out in the world. You see, our job as pastors, is not to do the work of proclaiming God's love out in the world so that you are excused from doing so. We're more like, to use a rather crude analogy, more like the mess hall chefs where the peace-keeper soldiers come in from the field in order to be fed, nourished and strengthened, before they are sent back out into the world, to be the front line ambassadors of God's work of turning the world towards his love. Our job is to try, to the best of our abilities, to serve up healthy, nourishing sermons; preside at prayerful, worshipful liturgies of the sacraments, teach solid and vitamin rich biblical truth.

For 35 years Pastor Jetto has served this office of Word and Sacrament in the Church of Christ. Though he was ordained into the priesthood of all believers when he was baptized, he was ordained to this particular office on this date in 1982. During that liturgy, which took place during the assembly of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, Bishop James Graefe asked Ken and three others who were ordained that same day this question: "Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Will you assume this office, believing that the Church's call is God's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament?" Within this question is the heart of how Lutherans understand God is at work in the world. We believe that the call of God to ministry comes through the Church of Christ. God speaks to us, both as pastors into the public ministry, and all of us through baptism, through the Church which is the body of Christ. This public office of Word and Sacrament is just that public. Not private. We, as pastors, are called by God through the Church to proclaim God's Word out in public, using actual words that people can hear and understand. The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are God's chosen ways to communicate love and mercy, forgiveness and inclusion to those who will hear. There is nothing magic, or secret, about what we do.

When Bishop Graefe asked his question of Ken and the others their response was, "I will, and I ask God to help me." God both respects our freedom and our will. God also answers the prayer for help. I can't think of a pastor who doesn't attest to the continuing help of God to see us through challenging and difficult times. Sometimes this church to which we are called to serve is frustrating, stubborn, doesn't always act in the ways of Christian love and peace. To some extent its always been that way. Just look at the New Testament and the relationship St. Paul had with the congregations in Corinth and Galatia. Stubborn folks they were and Paul sometimes had to speak to them like a Dutch Uncle. And yes, I suppose the other side is true as well. Sometimes we pastors can be stubborn and challenging to a congregation as well. Present company excluded of course. The point is we all need God's continuing help in exercising this ministry together. I remember answering the question put to me by my bishop, Bishop Howard McCarney, exactly 364 days later, on June 10, 1983. Like Pastor Jetto, I could not have served these 34 years without God answering that prayer for his help.

The end of the ordination liturgy in the Lutheran Church ends with the bishop saying, "Let it be acclaimed that Kenneth Jetto is ordained a minister in the Church of Christ. He has Christ's authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, serving God's people." That's really all we have as pastors in the church; the authority of Christ to serve God's people by publicly proclaiming the Word of God, and administering the Sacraments of God's love and grace. For 35 years of faithful and God-supported service by his servant Pastor Ken Jetto we give thanks to God. Amen.