

8th Sunday after Pentecost
July 14, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Titus 1:5-9

The reason I left you in Crete was so that you would set in order the things that were left unfinished and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you. ⁶Such a man is to be blameless, the husband of only one wife, and to have believing children who are not open to a charge of wild living or disobedience. ⁷Indeed an overseer, since he is God's steward, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not eager for dishonest gain. ⁸Instead, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, and disciplined. ⁹He must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he will be able both to encourage people by the sound teaching and also to correct those who oppose him.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week we looked at the meaningful ministry each one of us has – to tell God’s saving truth to the people in our lives. Today, we are going to have a much more narrow focus. The Word of God before us this morning is about the meaningful ministry of an elder/overseer. Paul uses the word ‘elder’ and the term ‘overseer’ interchangeably in this section of his letter to Titus. In our context, the term ‘pastor’ is used for the same role as the ‘elder/overseer.’ So, I guess this sermon is all about me? Pastors are taught to preach first to ourselves and today’s message will certainly apply to me.

However, it is for all of us as well. For pastors do not grow on trees. Pastors do not appear out of thin air. Pastors come from Christian congregations like ours. Pastors are raised in Christian homes like yours. Pastors are trained by groups of congregations like our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. And pastors are appointed or assigned to congregations in cities throughout the world by the men entrusted with that task, the District Presidents of our synod. As we go through the qualifications for being a pastor this morning, we’ll stop and consider how we can all be part of this meaningful ministry of training and appointing pastors to fill the many vacant pulpits in our synod.

The reason I left you in Crete was so that you would set in order the things that were left unfinished and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you.

Paul and Titus had done some missionary work together in Crete. Paul went on to another place and left Titus there with a very important task. Titus was functioning something like a district president of today or what other Christian traditions would call a bishop. He was to appoint men to oversee the new Christian congregations in the cities of Crete. Since Paul never stayed in one place very long, there were always things left unfinished. More teaching needed to be done. More need for baptisms would arise. There would be more need for spiritual care, comfort of the gospel, correction of sinners and rebuke of false teachers. After Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates were assigned to congregations in May, there remained 146 vacancies in our synod, which is a 12% vacancy rate. We really want to fill those vacancies so that the things left undone in these congregations can be accomplished. However, Paul tells us that there are certain qualifications. We can’t just assign a warm body to a congregation.

⁶Such a man is to be blameless, the husband of only one wife, and to have believing children who are not open to a charge of wild living or disobedience.

First, Paul tells us that a pastor is to be a man, a male human being. We see that here in the word for husband. It is the word for a male human. Paul lays out the reason for restricting the office of pastor to men in his first letter to Timothy. “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man*” (1 Timothy 2:12). He goes on to give the reason. “*For Adam was formed*

first, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:13). We should not attempt to give reasons for this principle beyond what God says. Trying to explain why God chose men to be pastors by finding between men and women is going beyond Scripture. God simply tells us that he set it up this way in the beginning, before Adam and Eve fell into sin. So, we look for young men to encourage to be pastors.

The next qualifications are about this man's family. A pastor does not have to be married. Paul was never married. But if a man is married, he must be a one-woman man, a husband who is faithful to his wife. His children must also be believers and relatively well behaved. A man who won't baptize and teach the Word to his own children should not be entrusted with doing so with other people's children.

Now we get to some character qualities.

⁷Indeed an overseer, since he is God's steward, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not eager for dishonest gain.

Blameless is a tall order, but it does not mean sinless. Blameless means that his reputation is not one of a life of sin. The rest of the list gives examples of ways to lose the blameless reputation. People soon attach a label of arrogant to a man who consistently puts others down to raise himself up. A man who does not control his temper, who is known for sharp words and shouting people down is not to be chosen as a pastor. The man who is known for getting a bit tipsy at gatherings is not to be chosen. The man who uses threats, intimidation, and force to get his way is not to be chosen. A pastor is not to be eager for dishonest gain.

It would be easy to point to the pastors who fly around in their own private jets, who have multimillion dollar empires, as examples of those who are eager for dishonest gain. Surely, we don't have to worry about this in our church body. Everyone knows that pastors barely make enough to get by financially. No one who is eager to make a lot of money would ever consider being a pastor.

I would like you to help me dispel this myth about being a pastor today. Maybe it was true in the past, but it is no longer true that a pastor means that you will live in poverty or barely get by all your life. As we in our synod attempt to recruit more young men into the ministry of the Word, we've heard that parents are discouraging their bright young sons from becoming pastors. 'There's no money in it...you'll make a lot more doing something else...you'll never be able to retire.' Of course, it is true that you will make more money in many career fields than being a pastor. But it is no longer true that pastors just barely make it financially. I will be able to retire comfortably if all goes as it has been going. But here is the truth for many pastors: I might not want to retire if I can go on serving. Being a pastor is a great calling. Help me dispel the myth about pastoral finances and instead spread the word about the wonderful ministry pastors get to be part of.

Paul has some positive qualifications for pastors next.

⁸Instead, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, and disciplined.

These are all characteristics we want to see in every Christian. So, how do we raise our sons to be pastors? Raise all our children to love other people, to love what God says is good, to control their sinful nature, to do what God says is right, to be serious about Jesus and the Bible, to order their life according to God's Word. How do parents do that? By not only teaching what God says, but by actually modeling these Christian characteristics in front of our children.

How do we in Christian congregations raise up young men who have the characteristics to be a pastor? Teach all the boys and girls of the congregation to love each other, to love God's Word, to control their words and behavior, to do what God says and be devoted to the Lord and his

Word. Sunday School teachers get to model and teach these Christian characteristics to the children. You get to welcome a little child in the pews with a smile so that the child and his or her parents know that church is a good place to be. You get to pray for the youth of our congregation that the Lord keeps them in the faith and that they glorify God in whatever vocation God calls them to. And if you see these characteristics developing in a young man, encourage him to consider being a pastor.

Having the character qualifications is 90% of being a pastor, but the rest of what Paul says is vital too.

He must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he will be able both to encourage people by the sound teaching and also to correct those who oppose him.

A strong faith in Christ and a strong knowledge of the Scriptures is required for a man to serve as a pastor. In the WELS, we take this part seriously. Before graduating and being ordained, a pastor in our synod may have gone to a Lutheran Elementary School. Many will have gone to one of our two preparatory high schools that focus on preparing the young men and women to be Lutheran pastors or teachers. Those who desire to be pastors go on to Martin Luther College where for 4 or 5 years, they learn Greek, Hebrew, Old and New Testament, and doctrine along with history, math, literature, science, and so on. Then these men go on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary where they spend the first two years studying the Bible in the original languages, learning to preach and teach, studying doctrine in great detail, learning from the history of the church, and absorbing the experiences of the professors who all were parish pastors at one time. After two years, the students are matched with a congregation and experienced pastor for a vicar year, a year to practice what they have learned. Finally, they return to the Seminary for a final year in the classroom before graduation and assignment to a congregation of their own.

It seems like a lot of training. But ask any experienced pastor and he will tell you that even if he thought he knew everything when he graduated, he soon found out that there was much more to learn. A pastor is to encourage with the gospel of Christ. He is also to teach sound doctrine which is everything Christ taught us in the Word. In addition, he is to recognize false teaching and be able to correct those who oppose the truth. Eight or nine years of education after high school is not too long to prepare a man for such tasks. You can be confident that a graduate from our Seminary has the knowledge of the Scriptures and that his character has been observed by many professors and pastors during his training.

What is your part in recruiting and training men to be pastors? Maybe you don't have any children to train and encourage at home. Maybe you aren't a Sunday School teacher type. Maybe you don't know any young men who have the qualifications to be a pastor. Maybe you think that recruiting and training more pastors is something for the big wigs at the synod headquarters to worry about. But there is something every member of this congregation can do. Jesus tells us:

“Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Part of your meaningful ministry is to pray to the Lord who laid down his life to save you and ask him to move more young men to consider, train and present themselves to the church as candidates to fill the vacant congregations in our synod.

And though you are not a professor, you are helping to train the next generation of pastors. When you give an offering marked for missions, 100% of that offering goes towards ministry that we do together with the other 1,200 or so congregations of the WELS. Last year, over \$23 million was given in this way. A big part of that goes to Home and World Missions to support missionaries and new congregations. Another big part goes to support our two prep high schools, Martin Luther College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Your gifts are being used every year to train the next pastors along with teachers and staff ministers.

The apostle Paul, who considered himself the worst of sinners, cherished the Son of God who died to forgive all of his sins. Paul cherished the gospel message that brought him to faith, the message he clung to until Jesus called him to his eternal home. Paul wanted others to know and trust and cherish the gospel of Jesus Christ too. That's why he wanted Titus to appoint elder/overseers (aka pastors), in each city. We love the Savior and the forgiveness he has won for us. We cherish the Word of God and the Sacraments by which the Holy Spirit delivers Christ's forgiveness. We want pastors in every city to do this and we even put it on the formal call document, which reads, "In extending this call to you we solemnly charge you to preach the gospel of our Lord among us in its truth and purity, to administer the sacraments in accordance with the inspired Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as incorporated in the Book of Concord of 1580, and to establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice at all times..."

We all get to be a part of training the children in our homes and church in the way of the Lord, encouraging young men to consider being a pastor, praying to the Lord for more workers in his harvest fields, financially supporting the training of men to be pastors, and giving generous offerings to start new missions in new cities where pastors will serve. May the love of Christ continue to move us to joyfully do our part in his Church.

Amen.