

Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11

Today we ordain, installing, and commissioning our newly elected officers. Just a little refresher on our polity. In the Presbyterian Church, we refer to the ministries of elders, deacons, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament as “ordered ministries,” which refers to them “ordering” church life. These ordered ministries are ordained positions. When we ordain someone, it does not mean that we push them up higher on a hierarchy or that we separate them from the rest of us. Rather, when we ordain someone, they are being placed into a particular task, called for a particular task. When we ordain Ministers of Word and Sacrament, we are placing them into the particular task of Word and Sacrament. When we ordain elders, we place them into the task of serving on the governing council of the church. When we ordain deacons, we place them into ministries of compassion. In our church they do pastoral care.

It is appropriate that we ordain on this particular day in the liturgical calendar, today being celebrated as the baptism of Jesus Christ Sunday. Mark’s rendition of the baptism is rather minimal compared to the other gospels. Jesus went to John at the Jordan River, and as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens were torn apart, the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven declared, “You are my Son; the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

This baptism initiated Jesus ministry. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by the devil, as though it was preparation for his ministry. Then Jesus began his ministry. In all four of the gospels, we read of his baptism, his temptation, and then he starts his ministry. Jesus’ baptism is seen as the

inauguration of his ministry. Jesus' baptism was his "ordination" into the ministry, his being called to ministry.

Your baptism is your ordination to ministry. If you are not an ordained leader in the church, it does not mean you do not have a valid ministry. The *Book of Order*, which is our constitution, states: "The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church." Ordered ministries are no more important than other ministries in the church. In your baptism, you were ordained to ministry. In your baptism, you were called by God.

You are called just as Jesus called his disciples. One of the first things Jesus did in his ministry was to call the twelve disciples. These twelve disciples received on-the-job-training to continue God's mission when Jesus ascended. Were they perfect? Absolutely not! Peter would open his mouth before he put his brain in gear and denied knowing Jesus when Jesus needed him most. James and John were seeking glory when they asked Jesus to sit at his left hand and his right hand in his glory. They were not perfect. They were needed. They were called.

Paul used body imagery in speaking of the church. Just as each member of the body, the eyes, the feet, the arms, and so on are needed, so each member of the church is needed. No one member can say to another member, we don't need you. The eye cannot say to the hand, we don't need you. A member cannot tell themselves, the body does not need me, just as the eye cannot say the body does not need me. The future of this church depends upon your responding to God's call.

I know that there are concerns—valid concerns—about the future of our church due to the fact that we are getting smaller, and, thus, our financial resources are

decreasing. This is not unique to us. The majority of churches out there are struggling with those same issues. The ministry of each and every one of you, each and every participant in our church, is vital. It is important for the health of the church and it is important for the health of your faith.

You may have heard the story of "That's Not My Job:"

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

There is an old story of a deacon who was collecting the offering during the Sunday school hour. In passing through one children's Sunday school class, he came to the little wooden church that was used for offerings. As he picked it up to empty it, a newcomer to the class admonished him: "Be careful, mister, you've got our church in your hands." God has placed the church into all of our hands.

There is a story about the early days of Henry Ford and Ford Motor Company. It concerns a machinist with Ford Motor Company who had "borrowed," over a period of years, tools and other automobile parts. Although it was against company policy, "everybody did it," and management did nothing about it. One day, however, the machinist was converted. He was baptized and became a believer who took his baptism seriously. The day after his baptism, he gathered up all the "tools" he had collected over the years, loaded them into his pickup, took them to the plant and presented them to the foreman with his confession and request for forgiveness. The foreman was so overcome by his honesty that he cabled Henry Ford himself, who was visiting a European plant. After explaining the entire event in detail, Ford immediately cabled back

this response: "Dam up the Detroit River," he said, "and baptize the entire plant." What is the significance of your baptism?

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the significance of our baptism. In the Presbyterian Church, like many mainline denominations, we are baptized only once. However, we sometimes need to reaffirm our baptism. This is what the *Westminster Larger Catechism* calls "improving our baptism." One church held a spiritual renewal week of services every year. On the last night there was always an opportunity for people to come forward and respond. Each year, the same woman, a pillar in the church, would go forward, and loudly pray, "Fill me up, Lord." After about thirty years of this one curmudgeon in the church yelled, "Don't do it Lord! She leaks." We all need refilling. We all need to reaffirm our baptismal calls.

This morning, our rite for the ordaining, installing, and commissioning of our newly elected leaders will include a reaffirmation of baptism for everyone, not just the newly elected leaders. What I'm asking this morning is that you reaffirm your baptism, and in doing so, consider what God is calling you to do through the church. When Jesus was baptized, the voice from heaven identified Jesus as God's "beloved son." The rest of the gospel describes how Jesus fulfilled the mission given him by God. Will we fulfill the mission that God has given us in our baptism?

To the Lord who speaks to us, strengthens us,
and blesses us with peace,
be all glory and honor forever. **Amen.**