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## ORDINATION

- 1 A recent email exchange with a friend prompts this posting. But the substance of these paragraphs is especially appropriate right now. I'm asking the question, in what follows, what's the point of ordination? Is there any longer a need for it?
- 2 I'll answer yes to my own question above. There's still a need for ordination to a ministry of Word and Sacrament. Hear me out.
- 3 In the Lutheran system, ordination carries with it two responsibilities. A) To preach the Word. And, B) to administer the sacraments. (Augsburg Confession V and elsewhere.) An ordained servant of the church may find many ways to keep busy. But these are the two important ministries that define ordination. To preach and to preside. All else may be attractive or even, on occasion, necessary. But preaching and presiding are the two inescapable requirements of ordination.
- 4 This tradition of the Lutheran church regarding ordination is almost unique among Christian church bodies. No other church body has this understanding. This means:
- 5 I am NOT ordained, in the Lutheran system, to be a counselor. Helping people cope with personal or interpersonal issues may on occasion indeed occupy the time and attention of an ordained servant of the church. But that would be the work of the left hand, so to speak. If you're ordained, you are expected to preach and to preside.
- 6 I am NOT ordained, in the Lutheran system, to be a community organizer, helping people to navigate the political and social systems around them. This too is the work of the left hand, if you are ordained.
- 7 I am NOT ordained, in the Lutheran system, to lead political protest marches, against this or that social injustice, or for this or that social good.
- 8 I am NOT ordained to administer a corporate business enterprise, directing a staff of scores of people and providing a vast program of services to people, from infant day care, to youth hockey teams, to elder care, and beyond
- 9 I am NOT ordained to be a resource broker, gathering townspeople, university administrators, students, and others to address problems between town and gown. (This was the preposterous conclusion reached by an extensive ecumenical study of

campus ministries in the 1970's by the Danforth Foundation, the money behind Purina Dog Chow and the Foundation that sent me to Europe in 1968-1969.)

10 I AM ordained, in the Lutheran system, to A) preach the Gospel and B) administer the sacraments. I have met clergy in almost every Christian denomination – and some Lutherans! – who regard their chief responsibilities to lie in 5 - 9 above. More than that: Who understand themselves to be ordained to do precisely those things in 5 - 9 above.

11 Now I am willing to grant that my ordination as a Lutheran can involve aspects of each of the above 5 - 9. And as an ordained Lutheran pastor, I am obliged to see to it that SOMEONE in my parish takes responsibility for each of the responsibilities in 5 - 9 above.

12 Hence I have walked in the protest march (7 above) organized by someone else – M L King, jr, for example. But my ordination does not require of me that I LEAD that protest march. As a Lutheran, my ordination requires of me that I devote time and energy and talent to A) and B) in 3 above.

13 Therefore: Without disparaging any of the roles I list in 5 - 9 above, MY distinct role as an ordained Lutheran is to focus on my parish's corporate worship. Without apology. Ordination, in the Lutheran system, requires attention to what happens when the parish gathers to worship.

14 Now all of the above is shaped and molded by what I call the Francis of Assisi model. Like all of life, for a Christian. "Preach the Gospel at all times," Francis is supposed to have said. "If necessary, use words." The force and witness of your own life will always be central. Ordination does not change that.

15 But the one who is ordained has to "use words". That's part of the job description of ordination. And the words used will always be measured by the life lived. If words and life are not congruent, you will be exposed as a hypocrite, soon enough!

16 Therefore no one needs to apologize for being ordained. Ordination does not make you a better person. Ordination means worrying about what happens on Sunday morning at worship. Preaching the Word and administering the sacraments is where Christians are made. Formed. Shaped. Molded.

17 Now that understanding of ordination is not widely appreciated. There is nothing more important than worship, for one who is ordained. Worship is not the fussy interest of some refined esthete. Worship is at the very heart of what it means to be ordained.

18 If you're ordained, and you don't give a rap about worship, there is something seriously wrong. Worship is where Christians are made.

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