



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
THE ORDINATION OF LINZI STAHLECKER TO THE SACRED ORDER OF PRIESTS  
THE FEAST OF SAINT PETER AND SAINT PAUL, JUNE 29, 2022  
EZEKIEL 34: 11-16; PSLAM 87; 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8; JOHN 21: 15-19

## CRYSTAL BALLS AND BLESSINGS

*2 Timothy 4:1-8 [In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.]*

Linzi was originally scheduled to be ordained a priest two weeks ago, on June 13, but that night her firstborn graduated from high school, and a gracious bishop helped resolve the predicament by suggesting let's have a second ordination service—this one, here tonight, on June 29, the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. We are delighted for it!

In the Church of England, there is a centuries-old tradition of ordinations occurring in Petertide—the days surrounding June 29, and since our ordinand this evening hails from England, it seems a fitting solution to be about this particular work tonight, in this cathedral, where Linzi has been called to serve as curate. We are

grateful for the synchronicity of it all, including the safe return of Bishop Rickel from the Holy Land just in time to lead us in this prayerful exercise of sacramental joy.

The scriptures we've just heard read are not those appointed for ordinations; they are the Propers for the Feast of Peter and Paul, but they seem to have ripened for our purposes tonight, as if they were waiting for us to converge precisely here and now, not just to commemorate Peter and Paul, or to lay hands on Linzi, but to allow the liturgical confluence to bless us in beautiful ways.

Ezekiel's pastoral vision of hope, the psalmist's ode to Jerusalem as source of blessing for all people, the gospel's resurrected Christ helping Peter unfold into his vocation—these readings are rich, and any one of them could serve sufficient wisdom for us to glean tonight, but I want to focus instead on the pastoral letter to Timothy for a moment as we ponder what we are doing, what we are asking of Linzi, and what we expect in the months and years to follow in her ministry as a priest.

The truth is we hear precious little in the Sunday lectionary from the first and second letters to Timothy. One brief excerpt from the first letter, and three snippets from the second, that's all we get, but there is a good

deal more there, with a trajectory of encouragement that is at times fierce and at times especially tender. Whether Paul actually wrote these to his apprentice Timothy is disputed, but the girding charge is to be faithful in your calling and remain grounded in prayer. Fitting words for an ordinand to hear; fitting for us all really.

Oh, there's more if you're interested: commentary on what makes a good bishop. That part doesn't make the Sunday Lectionary. Look it up, if you're interested.

There's also commentary on what makes a good deacon. The first attribute listed for deacons is they are to be serious, which sent me down a rabbit hole to see what the Greek word translated "serious" really meant. I had this vision of frowning deacons with wrinkled brows, and thought there must be something more implied here. There is, thankfully. It means dignified. Deacons: be dignified...which again, seems a fitting exhortation for us all.

There's a good deal of direction offered to presbyters including this passage we just heard read: Priest, guided by Christ in your life, proclaim the message with persistence in good times and bad, and serve the people with utmost patience. Carry out your ministry fully, guided by the mercy and grace

of God in your life, and look for it in the lives of those you serve.

The truth is, friends, no priest can do the work to which they are called with any measure of grace without the people participating in that ministry with them. Or to say it more emphatically, a priest cannot function except in the context of the Body of which they are a part. That body need not be a parish congregation; the body often forms in the sacred space of a hospital room or in a chaplain's mission in the world or in a circuit rider's tent of meeting or in a food line meeting eyes with the weary stranger. The dignity with which one serves is measured ultimately not by oneself, but by those who experience it as a gift shared.

One of the great revelations of the Reformation was that the sacramental work of priests makes no sense in solitary action. It is communal, which is to say, show up, be the Body with Linzi, who has many gifts to be shared.

The preacher at my ordination eighteen years ago this week—in Petertide—told me that what really happens when the priests huddle around the ordinand to lay hands on them alongside the bishop—what really happens is that one priest is designated to slip the ordinand a crystal ball which they can then

use to know all the pastoral needs of the people in their congregation.

The preacher said he was the one charged with delivering me my crystal ball, but he dropped it on the way to the church that day, and it shattered, so my parish and I were just going to have to do this work the old-fashioned way: by communicating clearly, speaking the truth in love to one another. He admonished the folks there to let Steve know what you need from him, and when. Don't assume he knows.

It was good counsel from a man who would later become my bishop and yours.

Linzi, I was charged with securing your crystal ball, but supply chain issues have made that impossible. The site offered no date when it would be available again.

So, friends, you'll need to be in ministry with Linzi the old-fashioned way. It works when we do it together.

Finally, Linzi, let me say to you that we are really glad you are here, that you've come to this moment, to this calling. The Church affirms you in this call. Remember that when you second-guess things, as we all do from time to time.

I know you came to the Christian way and life later than most, and perhaps that gives you a

particular perspective that will serve you well as you embark on this next part of the journey. You bring a fresh enthusiasm and insight along with many gifts to be shared. Use them to God's glory and the benefit of the people.

Do not let aspirations for perfection as a priest ensnare you; neither Peter nor Paul were anywhere close to perfect. You won't be either. It's okay. It's actually a good thing. Make mistakes and let the people see them, and you, as you learn from them. Love them and let them love you.

Nowhere in the ordinal is there a vow to be successful, whatever that means. Success is not the true measure of good ministry; faithfulness is. Let the words of these letters to Timothy wash over you: the girding charge for you is to be faithful in your calling and remain grounded in prayer. I tried for a time to do this without prayer; it doesn't work. I've seen other priests try, too; it inevitably spells disaster. So remain grounded in prayer.

Be guided by Christ in your life, proclaim the good news with persistence and serve the people with utmost patience. Carry out your ministry fully guided by the mercy and grace

of God in your life, and look for it in the lives of those you serve.

And then these last two instructions are meant not just for Linzi, but for us all:

Remember your baptism. The royal priesthood of Christ is shared by all Christians as the ministry of the baptized, of which you are a part. It is the base community from which everything flows. Let the waters of baptism remind you that the Body gathered is the locus of your ministry, wherever that may form.

Be dignified, which is not to say be serious. Let good humor season your ministry. The encouragement to be dignified is about worthiness. That's what the Greek word really means: be worthy of your calling. But remember: Your worth is a charism arising not from your own doing but from your belovedness; it is a gift from God for all the people of God. It is your dignity as a child of God.

Be dignified, which is to say at your core remember you are beloved of God. We all are.

And for that may God's holy name be praised.