



THE RIGHT REVEREND GREGORY H. RICKEL, BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF OLYMPIA
ORDINATIONS TO THE SACRED ORDER OF PRIESTS WITH HOLY EUCHARIST, JUNE 30, 2020
ISAIAH 6:1-8; PSALM 43; PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9; MATTHEW 9:35-38

SERMON FOR ORDINATION LITURGY

No doubt, none of us, and especially the four of you, could have possibly imagined this particular event in this particular way, whenever it was that you dreamt of it the first time. No way to put this but simply, this is odd.

Indeed, the events of the past few months, are surreal, awe inspiring in all the wrong ways, though we have certainly been warned for years, movies have been produced around the notion, books written, articles created and read. And yet, like most foreboding things in life, we have a very human way of believing it will never happen to us, or in our time, or in this place.

I am not sure ever, in my lifetime, there has been a moment like this, where literally, the whole world, could safely say, we are in this together. Or perhaps what I should say is, we, whether we like it or not, are in this together, even if many in this world do not want to believe it.

That basic truth about this moment and these ordinations, is even more compelling when you know what each of you four have gone through to get to this moment. Not one of you has followed, what we might say in this Church, the traditional approach to getting to this moment. Each and every one of you has a story that is unique, as every human does, but you four, like no other pack I have ordained before, have very unique and winding paths that brought you to this day. For some of you, it took the church a long time, too long to catch up with how you could offer yourself to this, for some your personal journey had to detour. For some of you, this wasn't even on your radar screen, until you made new discoveries and considered a different path.

I think because of all of this, you are among some of the most talented, experienced, and unique persons I have ever ordained, and all of that during one of the most different, and certainly odd, ordinations I have ever done,

and may ever do. Even though many who would want to be in this room with us tonight, cannot be, physically here, still they and so many more can join us that might not have if we did this the old fashioned way. While there is loss in how we have to do this tonight, there are many blessings in it too.

Which brings me to Matthew, the Gospel, and those words we have heard so many times before and so often on nights like this, in liturgies like this. These are the usual suspect readings, which I chose, for this very reason. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. This is the ultimate truth about our God, an abundant God, where there is no lack, no scarcity. In our God's realm there is more than enough for everyone. There is, in God, everything we need.

In this time when scarcity so easily raises its ugly head, and our divisions are highlighted, and our need for healing and wholeness laid bare, it would be easy to wonder, even more than usual, about that. About an abundant God, about the harvest being plentiful. I know, that personally, each of you grieve some aspect of this event, this night, that you had dreamt of, perhaps for many years, and yet tonight we move forward with many of those dreams dashed. You will all be priests at the end of this evening, that is if I have

anything to say about it, and of the very few things I do get to do on my own, this is surely one of them. So, barring some unforeseen event in the next few minutes, we are going to get this done today, but we are going to get it done, in a way none of us wished for or could have imagined.

I want to hold that up to you as a blessing tonight. I want to hold that up as another vestige and sign of God's unyielding abundance and love, for each of you, and for this Church.

When you consider our world, and all that is needed in it right now, you all are absolutely perfect for this time. All four of you are some of the greatest adapters I have ever known. Every one of you has had to have a very open mind, and a flexible spirit and attitude, as you have run up against a church, perhaps even a bishop, or two, who have had not just other plans, but rather old ones. Each of you have taught me, and us, and we are here tonight praying that will continue. I think the oddness, the newness, the awkwardness, the adventure of an unplanned night like tonight is exactly the crucible your ordinations, your service in this office, should be inaugurated with.

I want you all to hear what I believe so strongly about this night, and each of you.

That not one moment of your life up to this point, not one event, not one triumph, not one sorrow, not one defeat is wasted. You bring them all to this new call, this new role, this new office you are granted tonight.

One of you shared with me in a recent ember letter that you were indeed grieving, like I suspect all of you are, not having especially family and friends here, present for this moment. Family to vest you, friends to wish you their best, folks who have walked with you on your journey to this moment to sponsor and stand right with you and present you to the Church. Those are losses. No doubt. This one of you stated that a person you shared this with challenged you and said that was a selfish response, and at first you were offended. The person went on to say, the ordination is not about you, it is about the Church, and your offer to take up this office and inhabit it on our behalf. So easy to make it personal. As this one of you said, then George Floyd was killed, and you watched countless people die from COVID and from racism, and indeed it seemed to pale in comparison to your concern. As popularized a few years ago, in a sense, the platform is on fire, you have to decide if you are going to jump, or die. In a sense, the church is right there, and you four become the leaders in that

kind of moment. And so while this night is personal, it also isn't at all.

It is not entirely selfish to mourn the loss of the way we would have done this, but it is indeed, I believe, as your friend said, ultimately not about you, but about the Church. You are going to weave in and out of that lane all through your lives as ordained people, it being very personal, and it being about the office. I think, on these nights, it is really important to remember that, and for me, as preacher to accentuate it.

All of you are so gifted. I am just so certain tonight that we ought to be doing just what we are doing. And, at the same time, I want to be clear that this isn't really personal. You do not own this office. You inhabit it. I don't own the office of bishop, I inhabit it, on your behalf and at your behest. It was granted by the Church and it can be taken back by the Church. Yes, we do believe in ontological change and all of that stuff, once a priest, always a priest, but that is ontology, not reality, not technicality. The church does sometimes requires a person to un-inhabit the office, stop functioning in the role, even though, in the ontological realm, you indeed are still priest. This is a lifetime vow you take this night, and in so doing, you are given a mantle to wear, it is an office and title you

steward, and carry, in this life, till your dying breath.

I am not going to belabor this tonight, but in our meetings with the newly ordained in the weeks and months to come we will, the many ways the ordained fall into the trap of making it about them, the misguided ways we slip into owning this ordination, instead of caring for it, wearing it. I guess I could put it this way, there is a great danger that you might walk away from this night feeling a bit more precious than you were when you walked in. All of that is OK, but my hope and prayer is that this feeling will pass fairly quickly. Some of you have heard me say before that I used to worry about people getting married as being in love with the wedding and not the marriage. In this case, being in love with the ordination, and not the call, the work, the day to day life of ordained ministry, of being the steward of this office you take up.

So, this night is odd. The world we live in right now is odd. Please don't infer by me making this point that I am saying that all four of you are odd, .but not entirely letting go of that, let me say what I do really want to impart to you, you four are built for this moment, in the best of ways. Flannery O Connor once famously said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you odd.*" So be it. Consider that a blessing. You four

are right where you are supposed to be. All of us, here in this room, and those watching in bare feet, and pajamas, and popcorn or with their favorite beverage in hand, the odd at large you might say, are just as honored to be with you for it, however that can be, and thankful for you, and the offering of your life to this common ministry we share.

To all of you we say, thank you, for being willing to accept the odd, keep teaching us, keep challenging us, keep loving us, as we will keep loving you, keep walking with us, as we vow to walk with you. In short, please be your authentic selves, for those authentic selves are so very good, we are not asking anything more or less, and we, the Church, the Body of Christ, your beloved siblings, we need that, especially right now, in this odd time, most of all.

Beloved, I have said these words to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.