



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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ORDINATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD ON THE FEAST OF BASIL THE GREAT, JUNE 14, 2025

EZEKIEL 22:23-30; PSALM 139:1-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-13; LUKE 10:21-24

## UNENCUMBERED LOVE



**Luke 10-21-24** [*At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”*]

“Embrace the ministry of new.” This advice was offered to me not long after I began my first call. “New people,” this person said, “bring new insight that the rest of us need. They also remind us about the joy we bring to our ministries.” Eight years later, I remember that

conversation like it was yesterday. Eight years later, those words continue to echo in my head and guide my heart.

“Embrace the ministry of new.” Ordinands, this is what you have been doing, too! For the last six months, you have been leaning into

ordained life as deacons in God's church. Soon, you will begin your priestly ministry. As you live fully into that call, please remember that you will always be a deacon, too. All of your priestly colleagues, including the bishop, all of us will always be deacons. Remember that, and celebrate it!

"Embrace the ministry of new." It's also the context for today's gospel. Before Jesus prays with this particular group of people, he commissions them for ministry. Like you, he sends them off to their first calls at field ed sites and in congregations as varied as the church itself. They ponder and practice the wisdom he offers. Then, when the time is right, this group of newly minted clergy return home full of joy, ready to share their learnings and take on what's next. That's where today's passage picks up.

Before we leap too quickly to what's next, it's important to spend time with Jesus and those instructions of his. That's how you will step more fully into your calls as priests in Christ's one, holy, catholic, apostolic church. Let this wisdom echo in your heads and guide your hearts.

First, remember that what happens today is about all about Jesus. Ordinands, you know this, of course. You have finished your academic work and all the other canonical requirements necessary for ordination. But your vocation as a priest is more than an

intellectual one. Your relationship with Jesus is more than a professional one. The One who calls you into this vocation also calls you into a deep, abiding, ongoing relationship with him. You will deepen your relationship with Jesus through your preaching and teaching and through ongoing engagement with Scripture when you pray the daily office. But that is only part of the way you sustain your relationship with Jesus. If you rely on those things alone, you will grow famished and brittle after a while.

So make sure you seek Jesus out and nurture your relationship with him on a personal level, too. That is what makes the rest of it possible. Not only is the Bible you will receive a symbol of your authority. It also is a portal into the heart of Jesus. Read, mark, and inwardly digest those holy words for yourself. That is how *the* Word will feed your own relationship with Jesus and sustain you in this sacred calling.

Remember, too, that what happens today is not about you, at least not in the way you might think it is. At times in your ordained ministry, you may forget this. Many times in your ministry, you will be tasked with something that is beyond your capability at the time. Well meaning colleagues or a stressed out supervisor may nudge you into that uncertain space. I've read enough parish profiles to know that congregations do that, too. Yes, we also do it to ourselves, especially when we become untethered from the source of life that is Jesus.

Make sure you inhabit your priesthood in a way that is authentic to you, and not in a way that someone else thinks or pushes you into. Remember that “No.” is a complete sentence. Ask for help when you need it, and remember, you do not do this work alone. None of us do, regardless of the order of ministry placed upon us.

When you affirm your priestly vows, you will do in a very particular way. Remember that it is God who urges you to respond, not you speaking only for yourself. This is why the bishop will ask that same God to give you grace and power to perform what God has promised to do through you. It is also why one of the other symbols of your office is a stole. May it remind you that you are yoked together with Christ as a servant of God’s people. Remember, “it’s not about you. You are about it.”<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus commissions people, most of what he says makes sense. Heal the sick. Bring peace. Bear witness to the Good News of God’s reign. Those ancient instructions resemble the vows you six ordinands are about to make. But there is one additional direction Jesus gives that’s a little unusual. Before he sends people off, Jesus tells them to take nothing with them. No food. No money. No extra clothes. Today, he’d probably have the audacity to tell us not to take our cell phones or computers with us. Surely,

Jesus, you aren’t serious, are you? If so, why do we spend so much energy moving and then living out of boxes while spaces are made ready for our arrival?

One of my seminary professors said, “the vocation of a disciple means being possessed by the love of Jesus and not by the possessions themselves.”<sup>2</sup>

We have this habit of loading up Love with all kinds of conditions. We place burdens on it, really, and in the process, we limit what Love can do in and through our lives. Saint Paul is right. The love of God can and does bear all things. But we struggle with that kind of Love. The Love of God is not fickle, nor is it complicated. Instead, we are the ones who make it that way when we place conditions on it, or expect it to do what we want rather than what God needs, or when we fail to trust it or the work it is doing through and in us.

That’s why Jesus asks us to travel lightly. It is only through a constant shedding process that we learn “to acknowledge and then trust our total dependence on God to carry on in all circumstances.”<sup>3</sup>

For that shedding process to happen with integrity, you and I have to pray. That brings me to the final instruction. It is most important one, and the one that makes all of the rest this

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<sup>1</sup>M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 209), 69.

<sup>2</sup>Mittes McDonald DeChamplain, “Luke 10:1-16: Exegetical Perspective,” in *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Volume I*,

*Chapters 1-11*, ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 287.

<sup>3</sup>DeChamplain, 287.

possible. Whatever else you think you think the priesthood is, remember, that first, you are a person of prayer. There is nothing else more important than caring for your own soul.<sup>4</sup> “This is the key to our vocation: fostering an ever-deepening relationship with God.”<sup>5</sup> Without that relationship everything else falls apart. That relationship begins with and is always sustained through prayer. As the bishop reminded the clergy a few weeks ago, we are too busy *not* to pray. Remember that, my friends, and then stake your life and your vocation on it. That’s how you’ll become possessed by the love of God and not by possessions that trick you into thinking that they are your gods. That’s how you learn to travel lightly and trust the unburdened gift of love welling up inside and through you.

When those newly minted apprentices returned from their initial calls, they were filled with joy. They had trusted their hearts and the wisdom of their God, and it showed. They knew that at the heart of pastoral ministry were prayer, pastoral care, and proclamation of the Good News. Jesus noticed, too, and he responded with his own joy, with prayer and

thanksgiving, and with a blessing. He does that here and now, too.

Adam, Lynne, Kelly, McKenzi, Lia, and James: I want to invite you to stand up and turn to face the assembly. Take a look at your families, friends, mentors, colleagues, and all the people of God who have accompanied you up to this point on your journey.

Beloved colleagues, you are icons to the rest of us. Your joy and your faithfulness are a portal into something wondrous, mysterious, holy, and good. Thank you for saying yes to this call. Thank you for offering yourselves to this church. Thank you for reminding us why we have said yes to our own calls. In you, we see Jesus. Help us, always, to seek and share his presence with those we meet along the way. That is our shared call to practice together. May it be so today, and always.

Okay, friends, you can turn around and sit down. The Holy Spirit has been patient long enough. She has work to do, and so do we. Let’s get busy.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup>Barnes, 56.

<sup>5</sup>Ian Crowley, *The Contemplative Minister: Learning to Lead from the Still Centre*, (Abington: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015), 38.