

Body Building©

Matt. 20: 17-28; Eph. 4:1-8, 11-15

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Today is a very special time in the life of the church. In a few minutes, we will call up those who are being ordained and installed to join the Session as Ruling Elders of the church.

When an elder is ordained, that ordination is recognized in all the denomination – the Presbyterian Church (USA) – not just in the little church at Holly Presbyterian. I remember my mom being so proud that my granddad – her father – was, what she called, “Elder Emeritus” – that is an elder for life. She thought he was such a good elder they gave him a special, unique place in the Church. While my mother grew up Presbyterian, she didn’t understand that every ordained elder remains an elder throughout their lives.

My grandfather was a fine, Christian man, who was very dedicated to the church, but he was not above any other human – and he would be the first to say so. In fact, he was the kind of man who would so often put others before himself.

In our denomination, there are three “offices” that people can be called to for ordination: the office of Pastor or Minister (now called a Teaching Elder), is a call to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments; the office of Ruling Elder – are those who oversee the life and business of the church; and Deacons, whose call is particularly focused on caring for the congregation – a ministry of compassion and support. Holly Presbyterian Church does not have deacons, so that means the elders, along with the pastor, are especially charged with that important responsibility.

To be ordained means to be set apart for a particular service. It is an honor to be called by God to serve Him in a certain ministry. But this is an honor that requires humility, a spirit of servanthood and putting others before yourself.

When we use the term “Call” we are saying that it is God who has initiated this desire to serve Him and the church. To be called is not about begrudgingly taking on a job because no one else would do it. It is a belief that the Holy Spirit has a hand in bringing us to this place.

Of course, there are many of you here today who are ordained, and at one time (or more likely, numerous times) you served as an active elder and leader on the session in this church (or perhaps in another Presbyterian congregation).

That is why we *install* to active service those who are already ordained. And we *ordain and install* those who have never been ordained.

So how are we to lead? We are bombarded with politics these days, and it doesn't matter which side of the political fence you are on, we so often find braggers, people using their wealth and their power of position to get the attention of others. They have no hesitation in cutting down their running mates or anyone else if it suits them and gives them a step up.

Sometimes we see that happening in the business world as well. And, let us not fool ourselves; it can happen in the church too!

But isn't that so opposite from what Jesus taught and how Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus?

In Matthew we read of the mother of James and John (2 of Jesus' disciples) coming to Jesus and asking a favor. She wanted to talk Jesus into giving places of the greatest honor to her sons, asking if when Jesus came into his kingdom, could they each sit on either side of him – the place of honor in royalty.

Jesus said to her and to all of them, "You don't get it! Only the Father can give that honor, not me. But what you especially don't understand is that, to be a leader, to be beside me, means being last, not first. It means being a servant, not what we think of as king." Jesus said "even the Son of Man (even the Messiah, the Christ) came to serve, not be served."

To be Jesus' disciple means following his life style. And no, I don't mean wearing a tunic, growing a beard and wearing sandals everywhere. It means having the character of Christ. Having the mind of Christ. Acting like him toward others, leading the way he did – giving himself for the good of others, showing compassion, mercy and grace, putting others first, having great love for other people – especially honoring those who were looked down on or who were in a tough place in life.

Another characteristic we see in Jesus is his devotion to prayer, to taking time to himself for renewal of his spirit. I believe we are all called to do that as well. It is so important for leaders in the church to make that space for prayer and studying the scriptures and just listening for the Holy Spirit to give wisdom. But all of these characteristics are not just for leaders. They apply to all Christians.

Paul writes to the church saying much of the same thing. He is talking to the Gentiles, those who were not born into the Jewish faith and life, assuring them that for them as believers, as Christians, there is now no separation between Jews and Gentiles. We are one Church, we are equal as God's family. We are, together, the body of Christ, with Jesus as the head.

Paul says that the Holy Spirit equips the church with leaders – he names apostles (whom we might consider today as elders – followers of Christ and leaders of his people). The

Spirit names prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. That means that he “calls” them to be leaders and gives them spiritual gifts to accomplish that call. We are not called and then left out on a limb wondering how to function. If we are prayerful, attentive to the Spirit, we will receive what we need.

Paul says in Chapter 3 of Ephesians that God’s purpose is to use the Church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all ... (NLT). That is an important role we, as the Church, play: to display God’s wisdom – in it’s rich variety!

Paul compares the Church to our bodies – that every part is different and has a different function but all jobs are equally important. He reminds us that we need every part to work at full capacity.

The body is a good metaphor for the Church, if you think about it. We are all different. There are a variety of gifts – of strengths and abilities – among us. We are different in many ways: in the way we look, the way we think; our views are sometimes very different; we don’t all do things the same, even if we do have equal strengths for that particular job. One person might do it this way, while another might do it completely different – both have strengths – but there is a potential for division, if we aren’t careful.

Of course, not only are elders and pastors called to serve. All the people – all the congregation – all of you are also called and equipped to work for the good of the church in different areas. God equips us with what we need to be able to accomplish the mission – the vision God has for this particular church in Holly, Michigan.

In a few minutes, those who are to be ordained and installed to serve on the session will be asked some very important questions. They are called the Constitutional questions of our denomination. Those questions ask them to reaffirm their baptismal vows, trusting in the Lord Jesus and following him. But they also ask for commitment in following the guidelines of our church and in working with their peers in unity and serving you – the congregation who has elected them – with energy.

If you are not sure what those questions are about, I encourage you to come to the new member class on Saturday morning, January 28. I will be going over what those things mean at that time and anyone is welcome, even if you are already a member.

But then come the questions for all of you. You will be asked: if you, as members of the church, accept those who are before you as ruling elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?

God chose them. You elected them. But will you accept them as leaders, trusting that God, in his calling, has also equipped them for their work, even if it doesn’t always go along with your opinion?

You will also be asked if you agree to pray for them and to encourage them and to respect their decisions; to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church.

These are really important questions for you, as a follower of Christ, and as a part of His body, as we consider the unity of the Church. Paul says we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

We are body building here. You have elected people from among yourselves, trusting that God has initiated that call. The Session has agreed that they are ready. They, themselves, have prayed about it and are ready to serve, even with some fear and trepidation!

May you, members of the congregation, keep in mind that you elected these leaders and you answered that you will accept and support and follow their decisions and leadership, encouraging, not discouraging; working for unity as we all build up the body of Christ in love.

And may you, who are being ordained and installed, in fact the entire Session, remember that to serve with Christ leading, means to have a servants heart, to not desire to be first but to understand that a real leader puts others first.

Glory be to God, the Father and to Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord, and to the Holy Spirit for calling the Church into being and calling ordinary people to service – giving us all gifts to use for the Kingdom! Amen.