



September 2019 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

I have been in a reflective mood as of late. Perhaps it is because I am preparing this article at the beginning of August with some holiday time behind me and fall just over the horizon of my computer screen. Perhaps it is because on July 9 I celebrated thirty years of ordained ministry.

Time has flown by. I was ordained in my home congregation. Valhalla Lutheran Church, Valhalla Centre, Alberta. Yes, a Norwegian settlement with a handful of Germans sprinkled in this farming community.

Following ordination I have been blessed to serve, together with my wife, Cathy, with and among the people of Bethany Lutheran Church, Dickson (1989-1993), Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Lethbridge (1993-2002), Ascension Lutheran Church, Edmonton (2002-2010), as Assistant to the Bishop (beginning August 2010), and as Bishop (since January 26, 2013).

Within my time as Bishop, and certainly over the thirty years, there has been significant change, however, I continue to live by three core values which I first named while at College: servant-leadership, affirmation and involvement while seeking to engage, empower and equip the people of God.

Each year I seek to take time to reflect on this calling. Over these summer months I have been pondering, reflecting and writing about these thirty years, both the joys and the challenges.

Since 2013 I continue to return to a writing Cathy and I commissioned from Deacon Dr. Faith Nostbakken for my ordination as Bishop.

In shaping the poem, which Faith read during the Ordination, she considered the texts for the worship, the hymns selected for congregational song and ensemble singing, as well as a handful of images, metaphors and pastoral themes which are deeply meaningful to me.

The poem is titled: Ordination.

Nobody asks for drowning, certainly not the infant
gently tilted head towards the font,
arms and legs splayed suddenly with fear,
maybe a whimper or a shrill cry
as the robed one sifts through the sparkling water
and touches the tiny brow, barely downy with hair,
the rhythm of “The Father. . . and of the Son . . . and of the Holy Spirit”

incanted before a finely woven linen cloth dabs away the drops.
Everyone so easily forgets that dying can begin like this,
the cross fingered again on the forehead at the dawn of each new day.

Nobody asks to have her feet washed either,
not on Maundy Thursday even, unless her shoes
are polished, her stockings free of runs and easily removed,
her toenails trimmed and filed that very morning.
Maybe then she offers but can't quite face the eyes
of the one who silently lifts her foot from the basin,
wraps it awkwardly in a freshly laundered towel,
drying the creases between each toe.
Most would rather forget how almost embarrassing it is
to be served this way by a neighbor or a friend
much less the One incarnated in this sacred, tender act.

Nobody asks to be called into paradox either
when the people proclaim, "You lead!"
and in the same voice add, "You serve!"
our meanings translated into as many tongues
as join in song and blessing on this day.
Wash my feet, but don't embarrass me.
Splash my head with the font's damp cross
but don't let me stay in the drowning.
As you shepherd, walk beside us;
notice how cracked our feet really are,
how chapped our hands,
and whenever we meet eye-to-eye,
(especially try to meet us there)
call us brother, sister, as we are yours,
and remind us, so we don't forget,
of the wondrous ache and splendor
of love made whole first by being broken,
made new first by dying,
made perfect by the One whose body
here and now we are,
heads, hands, feet, eyes, tongues and all.

Blessings as you enter the fall season...see you at Area Gatherings.

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)