

Installation of David Brauer-Rieke as Bishop of the Oregon Synod  
Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
September 2007

Isaiah 42:5-9  
II Timothy 4:1-5  
Mark 4:1-9

Grace to you and peace in the name of our crucified and risen Christ.

David and Gretchen, members of the Brauer-Rieke family, people of God of the Oregon Synod, and ecumenical friends, it is a great joy for Ione and me to be back with you. We remember your gracious hospitality and your prayerful process of discerning whom to call as your bishop. Now as we begin to get to know David and Gretchen, we share in your feeling of expectant Advent hopefulness for your life and mission as a synod.

A reporter in Great Falls, Montana asked me why it is necessary that the presiding bishop be at the service of installation. I said, “First as a reminder that David is being installed as a bishop of this whole church and I represent the unity we share as an interdependent church body.” But it is also important for me as presiding bishop to say thank you to each of you for the many ways you live out your faith in daily life. Thank you for the ministries of your congregations and for your financial support of our shared mission. I want to extend a special word of gratitude to our ecumenical guests. Please know how committed we are to growing in the unity and diversity that are God’s gifts to us in the body of Christ.

Paul and Mary, we thank God for your leadership and friendship.

Paul instructs Timothy, “Do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”<sup>1</sup> There is it is, David. Could there be any clearer mandate than that for your call to serve as bishop? Paul’s mandate is not just for you. It is for each of us, every person ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament and every baptized believer. We are called to the work of an evangelist. In fact, I believe that is the unifying theme that runs throughout the readings you have chosen and that I pray will be a focus of your leadership.

Your call—our call—is a call to evangelical perseverance. Let us be clear from the outset that it is God’s call. That is absolutely clear from our Isaiah text:

Thus says God, the Lord,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:  
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

---

Copyright © 2007 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (ELCA). All rights reserved. This copyright notice must appear on all copies and reproductions. Copies may be produced for distribution within the ELCA by affiliated ELCA organizations.

<sup>1</sup> II Timothy 4:5, NRSV

I have given you as a covenant to the people. . .<sup>2</sup>

Who is this God who calls us? It is the God who creates. Isaiah declares:

Thus says God, the Lord,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness<sup>3</sup>

Could there be a clearer statement of the delight and the challenge of leadership in the context of the Pacific Northwest? I quote your own reflection, David. You wrote, “The Pacific Northwest is a creation-rich place in many ways. I dare say first article concerns dominate our spiritual consciousness. We receive this orientation from Native American spirituality, from the many environmental concerns that loom large in our part of the world, and simply through the natural beauty that surrounds us. The ‘sky slope’ or the ‘woods out hunting’ are articulated as many people’s church. They claim this without embarrassment or guilt. It is the Northwest.”<sup>4</sup> The beauty of creation is God’s handiwork and our stewardship.

It may be presumptuous of me, an outsider to the Pacific Northwest, to tell you what may be your greatest challenge in ministry, but in so doing I also know that I am not telling you—all of you—anything new because I hear it from you. It is the challenge of the call to evangelical perseverance. That is, the call to proclaim the good news that the God who gives life and breath and beauty is the God who also calls us. The God who calls us is the God who became flesh in Jesus, the Christ, forgiving, redeeming, and saving us. The God who calls us is the God who also gathers us in community and sends us into the world. What does God send us into the world to do? Paul says it is to proclaim the message and to be evangelists. In Isaiah we hear we are to be light to the nations. In the verses immediately preceding today’s text Isaiah says:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not grow faint or be crushed  
until he has established justice in the earth<sup>5</sup>

I believe it was Joseph Sittler who said, the heavens declare the glory of God, but they do not finally reveal the will of God. Not to put undue pressure on you, but you in the Pacific Northwest are in a unique position to lead our entire church in what it means to be engaged in ministry marked by evangelical perseverance—perseverance in proclaiming, inviting, and bearing witness to God revealed in the gathered community . Perseverance in proclaiming and articulating a Trinitarian God—not in the abstract, but in the day-to-day dynamic interaction and community that exists within God’s very self and by God’s creating, redeeming, gathering, and sending us. Evangelical perseverance

---

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 42: 5-6, NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> From Pastor Brauer-Rieke’s reflections on his call, June 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 42: 1,4, NRSV

calls for evangelical imagination, which I believe means we don't jump out of our Lutheran skins and try to be something we are not, but we embody our Lutheran understanding of the faith so that mission flows from it. Perseverance in calling this whole church to be engaged in God's work for the sake of the world, work that includes eco-justice, being a light to the nations, and bringing out prisoners from the dungeons of death, disease, poverty, war, exclusion, exploitation, sin, and shame. Perseverance in inviting people into the community that gathers around God's means of grace to be reconciled, renewed, forgiven, and freed in Christ for God's work in the world. It is God's work, our hands.

It is easy to lose heart, to fail to trust God's promise of the Holy Spirit, to dwell upon what we lack, or to long nostalgically for the past. Please don't get me wrong—it is understandable why we become discouraged. Evangelical perseverance sounds wonderful, Bishop Hanson, but do you know the pressures we face as pastors? We are supposed to be dynamic preachers, visionary leaders, charismatic personalities, and generous givers—no matter how much seminary debt we have. We are supposed to hold confirmands' attention with our creativity even while they text-message friends and are weary after a day in school plus athletic or music practice. We are supposed to be sensitive providers of pastoral care, getting to the hospital to pray with a parishioner before their 6:00 a.m. surgery even if no one told you that person was going to have surgery.

I heard a first-call pastor from another denomination preach in chapel at her seminary recently. She was very honest about her discouragement. She serves a congregation that worships sixty, but still has twelve committees. Every member is on a committee and they don't want to give up on committees even though they are tired of serving. Keeping the organization of the congregation seems all-consuming rather than finding a lean organization that will serve the congregation engaged in mission.

It is easy to lose heart given the consumer-oriented religious market place in which you need to attract and hold members, who as soon as their needs are not satisfied will go church shopping.

Parker Palmer reminds us the “shadow-casting monsters” that lurk within us also deter our perseverance. The shadow of insecurity about our self worth, the shadow of feeling that the whole universe is a battle ground, the shadow, especially among leaders, that responsibility for everything rests with us, and finally, the shadow-casting monster of our fears.

In the face of such obstacles, David, you are called to evangelical perseverance. Evangelical perseverance means having a ministry grounded in the good news of God's mercy and forgiveness in Christ. It will be impossible to persevere if you and your colleagues do not hear regularly the Good News proclaimed to you even as you have been called and sent to proclaim it to others. Paul challenges Timothy and us, “Proclaim the message, be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable...”<sup>6</sup> We persevere because God persists in God's desire to embrace us with merciful, loving arms, forgiving us for Jesus' sake, just as a parent receives and embraces a rebellious child.

David, do the work of an evangelist, but remember that is also God's call to evangelical resistance. As the late Will Herzfeld said after he witnessed growing violence West Africa on his last trip to Africa, “We are called as followers of Jesus to engage in

---

<sup>6</sup> II Timothy 4:2, NRSV

evangelical defiance.” The questions in the baptismal liturgy in Evangelical Lutheran Worship are so evocative, “Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?”<sup>7</sup> Our response to each question is, “I renounce them.”

Given that strong public evangelical defiance, we now are called to gather the faithful and discern what that means in the particular context of our lives of the world’s challenges and conflicts. Such evangelical resistance calls us to be bridge-builders in a society increasingly preoccupied with fortifying borders, erecting barriers, and defining boundaries that exclude. Evangelical resistance calls us to be truth-tellers in a culture of rampant deception—the truth about our bondage to sins from which we cannot free ourselves, the truth of God’s mercy in Christ Jesus, the truth of the power and privilege that come to us who are white in this increasingly diverse society, the truth of our earth-destroying consumptive living.

As my colleague John Thomas, president and general minister of the United Church of Christ reminds us, God’s mission “will require leaders schooled in the theological disciplines and practiced in the spiritual disciplines, lest the truth that is proclaimed be merely warmed-over political agenda or social ideology with a pious veneer.”<sup>8</sup> Paul is equally forthright in writing to Timothy to, “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”<sup>9</sup>

Oh David, how tempting it is for each of us to use that verse to undergird the certainty of our deeply held convictions and condemn those with whom we do not agree. It seems to me that the task of leadership today is to convene communities of the faith that do not always agree, calling us to prayerful, communal discernment of the truth that occurs through engagement with the Scriptures in the context of our life in the world.

David, for your calling to leadership, may you be given the gift of evangelical patience. “Encourage, with the utmost patience,”<sup>10</sup> writes Paul. I believe patience, pathos, and passion come from the same root. Patience is marked by pathos—standing with those who suffer and the creation as it groans in travail. It is a cruciform patience born of Christ’s passion—his suffering, death, and resurrection for our sins and for the reconciliation of the whole creation. In our driven, multi-tasking, competitive culture, evangelical patience may be our most radical witness to God’s faithfulness. Listen to God’s promise, “See the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare”<sup>11</sup>

David, do the work of an evangelist—work that calls for evangelical perseverance, evangelical resistance and defiance, evangelical patience, and evangelical extravagance. “Listen,” Jesus instructed the large crowd beside the sea. Listening may be your most

---

<sup>7</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Service of Holy Baptism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2006) 229.

<sup>8</sup> John Thomas, Pontiff, *Prophet, Poet: What Kind of Leaders Will We Require?* Speech given at the Annual Consultation of the United Church of Christ, San Antonio, Texas, February 2002. 6.

<sup>9</sup> II Timothy 4:2-4, NRSV

<sup>10</sup> II Timothy 4:2, NRSV

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 42:9, NRSV.

important invitation and admonition, David. “Listen, a sower went out to sow,”<sup>12</sup> and what unfolds is the parable of the extravagant sowing of seeds and the promise there will be an abundant harvest. The abundant harvest is God’s promise, for it is God’s work, our hands. An abundant harvest, despite the resistance we encounter, and the challenges we name, is cause for hope.

In the Middle East in Jesus’ day the seed was sown generously over all kinds of soil, amidst beating sun and hungry birds. After sowing, the sower would go back to work the seed into the soil. It is the vocation of all the baptized to sow the seeds of the good news of God’s extravagant mercy in Christ Jesus. We sow the seed through our words and deeds, through catechesis, proclamation, prayer, Scripture reading, teaching, and listening. We work the soil so that the Holy Spirit might give growth in truth and witness and God might bring the harvest.

President Richard Bliese of Luther Seminary wrote,

The great need of the Lutheran church today is for a renewal of theological vision about evangelizing. This need for a renewed vision about evangelizing is, at its core, not about clergy or the baptized *doing anything*. It is a vision about God’s activity in the world through Jesus Christ and our own identification with that activity. The flame of our theological imagination must be ignited around evangelizing. We are a church needing to be evangelized so that we can once again catch a vision of God’s amazing activities in the world. God’s mission in the world has a church. Evangelizing is at the core of the church’s self understanding.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, President Bliese reminds us that we are both soil and sowers. We are eucharistic communities in which the seed of the Gospel is planted and nourished through the means of grace and become the sacramental presence of God’s love and grace, mercy and justice in the world.

No congregation is so small that it is excluded from God’s call. No context is so impossible that we are exempt from extravagantly sowing the seed of the Gospel.

David, may the Spirit grant you humility and courage to do the work of an evangelist, calling this synod to evangelical perseverance, resistance, patience, and extravagance. It is God’s call and God will bring the harvest. What a cause for hope! Thanks be to God. Amen.

---

<sup>12</sup> Mark 4: 3, NRSV.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution. Addressing the Captives in Babylon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2005) 35.