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Ordination Service of The Rev. A. W. Huth: John 9, 10, 11, 1931

O.P. Kretzmann

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Ordination

JOHN 9, 10 and 11

"And they said unto him, 'How were thine eyes opened?' He answered and said 'A man that is called Jesus, made clay and anointed mine eyes and said unto me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash:" and I went and washed, and I received sight."

Sermon by Prof. O. P. Kretzmann:
Ordination and Installation of
The Rev. A. W. Huth as
Assistant Pastor of
Bethlehem Ev. Lutheran Church,
Baltimore, Maryland,

August 2, 1931 - 7 P. M.

JOHN 9, 10 and 11.

"And they said unto him, 'How were thine eyes opened?' He answered and said 'A man that is called Jesus, made clay and anointed mine eyes and said unto me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash:" and I went and washed, and I received sight."

Fifteen hundred years ago last August in the city of Hippo in North Africa an old man lay dying. Around the walls of the city the vandals from the North were encamped, and there were few who did not know that Hippo was doomed. Twenty years earlier Rome had fallen before the barbarians in a mighty cataclysm of destruction. Now they were sweeping over North Africa. History was being made, ancient and glorious empires were crumbling into dust and ashes and on their ruins stood the men from the North whose hands were to ^{sway} ~~swing~~ the rod of empire for many long centuries. And in that white, quiet little room at Hippo an old man lay dying. The Roman empire might pass away - but that did not matter; his friends might fall from the glory of dominion to the shame of defeat - it did not matter; his own beloved city might be burned and razed to the ground - it did not matter. He turned his face to the wall and said, "I am going home to the abiding city, the city of God." That man was Aurelius Augustinus - the immortal St. Augustine. A few days later they laid his tired body in its windowless house of peace. The storms and winds of fifteen hundred years have passed over that lonely grave in North Africa - and yet St. Augustine lives today because he was one of those great captains in the army of God, one of those princes in the Kingdom of the

Crucified whose entire life was dominated and controlled by the thought of the city of God. Here in time nothing was more important than the building of this city; in eternity there was nothing but her surpassing glory. And in the center of this city stood He who was the motive and end of all Augustine's consuming love for her, the reason for her greatness and the crown of her glory - the Lord Jesus - in whose commanding presence Augustine and all the builders of the city of God through the long rolling years have stood continually and forever. And if we today - fifteen hundred years later - standing in the evening time of the world with the shadows of eternity already upon us, serving a Church in which the Apostolic fires have died and the flames of Christ-inspired devotion are burning low - if we today ask: "What was the secret of their courage, their flaming devotion, their supreme singleness of purpose?" we can only answer that we have lost the divinely imposed philosophy of the holy ministry which was theirs, that we have forgotten that the office of the Christian ministry is the direct negation of all that men consider important, and that nothing is more supremely necessary today than a repentant return to the fundamental ideals of the New Testament ministry as laid down in the pages of Holy Writ.

And these ideals, my dear brother in God, I find summarized in the words which I read to you a moment ago, One of the most striking things about our Lord Jesus while he was here on earth was that he always did the unexpected. In the words immediately preceding our text He had temporarily suspended the laws of nature by healing a man who had never seen the light of the sun. In the economy of His almighty power this actually required only a thought or a word, and the light would have come to those

poor eyes blinded since birth. But no - He does not perform the miracle alone. To the amazement of the disciples and the curious crowd He stooped, took clay and placed it tenderly on the shadowed eyes of the beggar. It pleased Him to use some means to demonstrate His power - and the instrument He used then and still uses today is the dust of the earth, the dust from which you and I came, the dust to which you and I must return. No angel came down to touch the eyes of the beggar with the tender hand of heaven; no archangel came to announce that the unbreakable laws of nature had been broken by Him who had made them. There was only the Lord Jesus and the dust of the earth, - but in His tender hands that dust became an instrument of timeless glory and eternal power - an instrument which tore down the laws which had existed for four thousand years and transformed a hell of darkness into a heaven of light. And for two thousand years He has been doing nothing but that - for two thousand years He has been stooping down from heaven and taking into His hands men like you and me, the dust of the earth, to use them as the instrument of His almighty power to open the darkened eyes of men who still see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. Even today He has nothing else in His hands; no angel is preaching the eternal Gospel; no heavenly host proclaims the advent of the King into the hearts of men. There is an old legend that after His ascension our Lord was met at the gates of heaven by the angel Gabriel..... And so today it is still up to us, the clay and the dust in the hands of the living God.

Tonight, my dear brother in God, you are being ordained and installed into the office of the holy ministry. That is our weak and colloquial way of saying that tonight the Lord Jesus

*Clay in the hands
of the living God -
what does it
mean?*

is reaching down from heaven to take you into the hand of His almighty power, to use you as an instrument for the salvation of sinbroken souls, to make you a tool to hew out his divine purposes in the hearts of men. And that means first of all that your heart must know, finally and forever, that you are as clay in the hands of the living God. You are to have no purpose of your own. His will must be your peace. His command must be your surrender. The clay in the blessed hand of the healing Christ of our text had no will of its own, no consciousness of self, no purposes which might come into conflict with the purposes of the hands that moulded it to the sinblinded eyes of the lowly Judean beggar. And from this very moment you are to be as the clay which even today He uses to accomplish the work of His eternal pity in the sintorn hearts of the world. Nothing less than that will do. Across the silent years His warning voice comes to you tonight: "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me"; and the warning is timeless for the graves of the world are full of men who were not worthy of Him. — ~~and the~~ men who went down into the dust crushed and broken because they thought that the ministry was a broad highroad to power and success instead of a rugged, narrow pathway which leads finally to a Calvary of sacrifice and selfless devotion to Him whose ministry lasted only three years because the ministers of the Jewish church, wise men and proud men and shrewd men, did not like the idea of becoming as the dust of the earth and the clay of the Judean plain.

Clay in the hands of the living God - what a philosophy of life for the twentieth century. The human heart can imagine nothing more definitely and divinely contrary to the spirit of the age in which the Lord God has placed us. In a time in which

the hearts of men are mad with the lust for power and the pride of life, the Christian ministry must have no power apart from that which comes from the timeless strength of the Spirit of the living God; in a time when an entire civilization is built on the assumption that the satisfaction of material needs is the end and aim of life, the Christian minister is to pour contempt upon all those things which would make him clay in the hands of men rather than in the hands of the living God. My dear brother in God, what a life waits for you tonight. ^{what a life is to be in the minority} Before you lie the highways of the world, heavy with the world's commerce, filled with men and women bent upon laying up the treasures of this earth. To them you are to bring the treasures of heaven. Before you stand the temples of a thousand creeds, rich storehouses of the accumulated wisdom and the philosophy of men. To them you are to bring the wisdom of God, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness. Before you stand the great palaces of the rich into whose gold and luxury you are to hurl the story of a shameful Cross and the atoning death of a lowly Nazarene, the Son of a Jewish carpenter. You are to preach Christ and Him crucified - in season and out of season - and the preaching of the Cross has never been popular and will never be popular. You are therefore to beware above all of the supreme curse of the younger ministry - the lust for popularity. Flattery has ruined more clay in the hands of the living God than any other weapon in the hands of the prince of darkness. And nothing will remove its ever-present threat from our ministry today, but the deep and overwhelming consciousness of the fact that despite the loud and insistent demand for popular preachers, good mixers and high-powered executives, we are to be and remain clay in the hands of the saving

Stop here!
Titus
These things will
darken down
discourage
nothing more
nothing less
at the end
still stay

Christ - clay which must wait for eternity before it is transformed into a Christ-given glory and power.

You see, my dear brother in God, I do not wish you an easy road in the ministry - but I do wish you a Christ-guided road. You have been singularly blessed in the field of labor to which the Lord of the Church has assigned you. There are men and women here in Bethlehem who will understand a Christ-inspired view of the holy ministry; men and women who will not make demands upon your time and energy which the Lord Himself does not make; men and women who have themselves become clay in the hands of the living God. And above all, you are singularly blessed in being called to work beside a man who has tasted all the bitterness and the sweetness of the ministry for a third of a century, and who knows today what it means to offer up his health and strength at the wounded feet of the King of men and Savior of the world. It is sometimes said that the office of an assistant pastor is a difficult position; for you it will not be, because you will find in the pastor of this church a man who has himself become clay in the hands of the living God and whose ministry will be a constant and strengthening source of inspiration to you.

And now you may ask: What shall be my reward for all this? What will I get out of it? I should like to tell you: Nothing but a crown of thorns. Many of the rewards of the ministry which we usually enumerate are only the results of being too easily satisfied and too eager for some reward on this side of eternity. But there is one reward for you even before the gates of heaven open - and in order that you may see it more clearly I point you to the greatest human preacher the world has ever known, the immortal St. Paul. About sixty after Christ he

was sitting in a prison in Rome. Twenty-five years had passed since that memorable day on the road to Damascus when he too first knew that he would have to become clay in the hands of the living God. Twenty-five weary and heartbreaking years in which the relentless hand of the living Christ had driven him, a lonely wanderer, over the face of the Roman Empire. Twenty-five painful and toilsome years in which his torn and broken body had felt again and again the lash of the whip and the sickening thud of stone striking human flesh. Twenty-five joyous and conquering years in which he had become the greatest instrument in the hands of the limitless Christ that the world has ever known. And now evening had come. His cell in a Roman prison had become the headquarters of the Christian Church - but it was also his vestibule to death. Before death came he wanted to write a few letters to those whom he had brought to Christ. In a striking illustration he wanted to show them exactly what his relationship to Christ had meant to him. And as he was looking about for such an illustration he suddenly noticed that everything around him was marked with the stamp of the Imperial Caesar. The clothes of the jailer were marked. The chain about his wrist, which bound him to the wall of the cell, was stamped with the mark of Caesar. The utensils from which he ate and drank bore the mark of Caesar. The initials of the Emperor were engraven in the palm of the guard who waited on him. And so St. Paul turned to the wall and wrote on his tablet the memorable words: "I bear branded on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He rolled up his sleeve and there was a great mark which he had received at Philippi. He uncovered his shoulder where the flesh was still torn and broken from the time he had been stoned at Lystra. His whole body bore the marks of the Lord Jesus. There is your reward. When your brief

day in the ministry is ended and the pitiless light of eternity falls upon you and your work, I hope and pray that you will still be clay in the hands of the living Christ - but clay now which bears upon it, body and soul, the blessed and eternal marks of the Lord Jesus.

AMEN.