

TEXT: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

THEME: THE TRUSTWORTHY WORD IS PROCLAIMED BY A FAITHFUL PASTOR

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (1 Timothy 3:1-7). NIV84

Dear Christian Friends:

ENCOURAGE GIFTED YOUNG MEN

Some are easy to identify. The young boy sings out parts of the liturgy a beat behind everyone else. To his parents' embarrassment, he shouts his commentary on the service or mimics the pastor. When he plays at home, he dresses in a bathrobe and conducts services for his congregation of plush, stuffed friends. He sees that the work of the pastor is good work, and he dreams of being a pastor.

Some are not as easy to identify, but the gifts are still recognizable. He is kind and personable. He is intelligent. He enjoys and participates in Bible class. He has musical gifts. Or there is just something about him, something you can't quite put your finger on that says to you, "He has the gifts to be a pastor."

In either case, have you encouraged him? Have you said to him, "You will make a fine pastor" or "Have you considered being a pastor? God has given you the gifts to do that wonderful work"? Have you, either individually or through our congregation's student aid fund, offered him your financial encouragement? I hope you have for many reasons. First, this desire to be an overseer or pastor is a strong desire to do a very good work, as God's Word says: **"If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."** God's people, like you, will always need faithful and gifted men to serve them as pastors. You treasure the truths and promises of God and also intensely desire that they be preached and proclaimed faithfully.

Because the world is growing more hostile toward Christians and especially toward those who oversee or shepherd them, there may be Christian parents who don't want this kind of life for their sons. They would rather have them pursue a career respected by the world and less likely to make them targets of persecution. Yet, how thankful we can be that Simeon was straightforward with Mary! He told her that her dear baby boy was born to die. Her heart would be pierced with grief, but through her son's suffering, God would save mankind from all sin, guilt, and death. And so he did. He gave his Son over to death and through him won so many more sons and daughters for himself, including you as a believer

in Christ. Only through the faithful preaching of the gospel will more be added and preserved in God's family.

Second, there is a shortage of pastors and it will only get worse. When I graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1978, there were 62 men in my class and we all received calls into the pastoral ministry. Now some of my classmates are retiring. I don't know how they got to be so old! Last year when my oldest son, David, graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, there were only 22 in his class. You can do the math. And the graduating classes are going to remain small for the foreseeable future. There will not be enough new pastors to replace the retiring pastors. So, please, my friends, encourage the gifted young men among us who desire this noble work of shepherding souls, taking care of God's people, of being a pastor.

ENCOURAGE AND PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR

Being a pastor is a noble task, but it is also difficult work. God's Word tells us of the requirements for being a pastor: **Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.** Some of the requirements Paul listed may seem easy for you, while others may not. Although each of us wrestles in varying degrees with the temptations implied or expressed in these words, God requires that your pastor meet these requirements daily.

No one can, with cause, point fingers at him and accuse him of any great sin. If he is married, he must be faithful to his wife. He must be controlled in his use of alcohol. He must maintain self-control over all his impulses. He must be respectable, modest, and not excessive in his behavior. He must be welcoming to strangers and friends. He must be able to teach God's Word in ways that Christians will be encouraged and enlightened, not frustrated or confused. He must not be a bully. He must be gentle as he shepherds God's flock. He must not be the kind of person who picks fights but one who keeps the peace. He must also be content, not fostering love for money and things.

Your pastor daily wrestles against the devil's temptations to sin in such ways. Satan strives at least to disqualify him from his position as shepherd for nothing less than to shipwreck his faith. And from time to time in thought, if not also in word and action, your pastor may be guilty of some of these sins, for he too lives in the same grace of God you enjoy. He loves and treasures Jesus as his priceless treasure every bit as much as you do. But who helps your pastor? Who is encouraging him in his struggle against temptation and sin? Who announces to him the forgiveness of his sins? Who prays for him?

You will, won't you? You will pray for him and encourage him with the gospel of forgiveness. You will do this because you trust that he is God's called shepherd of your soul. You will do this because you love the very same Savior. Jesus is your righteousness and your pastor's righteousness. Jesus is your sacrifice of atonement and your pastor's sacrifice of atonement.

What a list of requirements that God has established for any man who deeply desires this noble task of being a pastor! While it is true that God requires nothing less of any

Christian, it is also true that our calling as Christians does not depend on our good reputation. The call to the pastoral ministry, however, does. The pastor must continue to live up to these qualifications. If he does not, he is disqualified.

Nevertheless, God graciously continues to provide qualified men with the desire to serve as pastors. As he does, his Spirit keeps working through Word and sacraments to keep them qualified. Why has God done it this way? There are several reasons, not the least of which is that he loves you. He has established the office of pastor and has instilled in men the desire to pursue this noble work so that he might preserve you in the faith through the preaching of his Word and the administration of his sacraments. Thank God that he will keep doing this as long as the earth endures. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Holy Spirit, as you instill in young men the desire to be pastors, give us the love to encourage them with our words and gifts in this good work.

Dear Savior, thank you for giving us faithful pastors to watch over our souls. Help them to fight against temptation and to meet the standards you have set for them. Assure them of your forgiveness and give them the zeal to do your work.

Heavenly Father, thank you for our pastors and their families. Thank you for the godly example they strive to set. Bless their faithful efforts, and help us to follow their example.

Lord of love, we celebrate this day the love that Lloyd and Loretta Kramer have shared as husband and wife for 60 years. Bless their anniversary day, and bless the bond that they have with one another and with you. Let their love continue to grow. Let their hearts be filled with gladness and gratitude for the gift of marriage you have given. Let their example be an encouragement to all of us. And let their lives express their deep appreciation for your great love for them.

Gracious Triune God, assure our pastors of your forgiveness in Christ and of your call. Help them to maintain their reputations both inside and outside our congregation. Thank you, dear God, for the schools of ministerial education, through which you continue to provide us with pastors who shepherd our souls. Amen.