

The Right Story: Looking at Rite Vocatus in Scripture From a Narrative Perspective.

Rev. Jason Swan (Submitted to NOW District for Inclusion on www.licensedlaydeacon.com)

Introduction

There have been many perspectives in our mutual discussion of Licensed Lay Deacons as a District and Synod leading up to Convention this summer. There have been discussions based in philosophy, rhetoric, and logic,¹ discussions looking at data from the African mission field,² and many more. What I propose to do today is to take a narrative approach at scripture and the early church to see how the idea of a rightly ordered call manifests itself across the Law and the Prophets and well as in the New Testament. Along with that, we will look at the early church to see how the understanding of ordination and call into the office of public preaching was understood as the Church expanded and needed help as it grew outside the confines of the Levant and the surrounding areas and moved into the far flung places within the Roman Empire and beyond. This will be done with the hope of demonstrating that idea of a rightly ordered call into the office of public ministry was not the product of 16th century German cultural milieu, nor was the consistent exercise of the office of public proclamation steadily separate from the rightly ordered call.

The Law and the Prophets

When we take a step back and examine the Biblical narrative as a whole as it pertains to God speaking to, working in, and living in the midst of His people, we recognize that the weighty glory of Yahweh and His unimaginable holiness leads to many interactions with His beloved Israel and the world through mediators. The primary way in which Yahweh establishes continued contact, direction and mediation is the Levitical Priesthood.³ It is in this Holy Office that the administration of the Tabernacle and Temple is carried out, the daily sacrifices are offered, the high days in the church year observed, and the Day of Atonement is completed. This regular work of God in the midst of His people has a set order according to the law Yahweh laid out for the regular worship life of his people, including how forgiveness for the individual and nation is received.

¹ Category Error, Common Sense, and the Office of the Public Ministry. Dustin Kunkel, Lutheran Mission Matters. The Lutheran Society for Missiology Volume XXIV, No. 1 (Issue 47) January 2016. See also Rev. Eric Lange: A Fraternal Response to Dustin Kunkel <https://licensedlaydeacon.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/a-fraternal-response-to-dustin-kunkel-final.pdf>

² Mission Field Snapshot: Ghana, West Africa: 1973—1994 Extending the Office of Ministry: Equipping Disciples, Teaching Elders, and Evangelists to Proclaim the Good News. Rev. Dan Kunkel

³ Leviticus 8:30 Aaron and his sons are consecrated for Public Ministry for Israel in the present time and in the generations to come.

This holy office is utilized by God throughout the entirety of the Law and the Prophets through the fulfillment by Christ of the Covenants between Yahweh, Israel, and the world in his Kingly Priesthood. However, when we also take a look at the biblical narrative, we also see God calling individuals outside of the regular priesthood in order to preach the word of God and deliver messages of judgement and grace to Israel and the rest of the world⁴.

One thing that is abundantly clear throughout the ministries of these individuals is that they were clearly and rightly called into their prophetic office. In these cases, they received immediate calls into their respective ministries by Yahweh Himself. In order to demonstrate the validity of these calls, various visible and visible signs and symbols accompanied their messages of judgement and grace.

One pattern emerges as we look at the lives of these men. In a notable number of cases, the prior vocation of these men is shepherd. Why is this noteworthy? In the Task Force report to the Synod⁵, the prevalent way in which the Office of Public Preaching is referred to is shepherd. Again, when we consider the larger biblical narrative, we see patterns emerge, and foreshadowing take place. Typology⁶ is a typical theological tool used to demonstrate this foreshadowing in the Old Testament, especially in reference to Christ.

Though not an explicit example of typology, at least in terms of the Office of Public Ministry after the work of Christ, we do see shepherds play an important and predominate role within the public preaching life of Israel. Perhaps the first and chief example of this is the person of Moses. In his flight to Midian after the death of the Egyptian workers, Moses went into the vocation of shepherd.⁷ It is in this vocation that Yahweh appears to Moses to bring him into the office of Prophet and public preaching through an immediate call through the burning bush. Along with the divine call, there were many and varied signs that Yahweh did through Moses to demonstrate before Pharaoh, Egypt, and Israel that indeed he had been given this task of deliverance from oppression as well as the giving of God's Holy and Divine Word- the

⁴ We will be focusing on the Office of Prophet in this opening section. In this prophetic office, we recognize the ultimate work of these men in the Old Testament is to look to and point to the fulfilling work of Jesus as Messiah. Certainly the prophets also dealt with immediate concerns within the life of Israel and the surrounding nations. However, with everything pertaining to Yahweh's interaction with Israel, the final goal and work of the covenants is to bring about the salvation and consolation of Israel through Christ and his death and resurrection.

⁵ TF 4-06A is the collaborative work of several individuals appointed by the Synod to examine the issue of Licensed Lay Deacons and their role within our Synod. One of the aspects of this report was a detailed exegetical look at the descriptors of the office of Public Preaching in the New Testament. Of the two primary descriptors, overseer and shepherd, shepherd was the one that was overwhelmingly used more with 64 uses, and in a more variety of contexts, indicating the personal and interactive role of the person tasked to public preach and administer the sacraments. Overseer was used four times in the New Testament.

⁶ An example of typology is the person of King David, who serves as a type of Christ in his righteous rule. In Isaiah 9, we see the Christ as the ideal Davidic king, with David's rule serving as a type for the rule of the Messiah.

⁷ Exodus 3:1

Law. Though Moses was a member of the house of Levi,⁸ the Levitical priesthood had not been established⁹, which meant that Moses was not set apart as a priest at the time. Yet, Yahweh called him into ministry and leadership and the visible signs and symbols¹⁰ accompanied his work and served to show the origin and legitimacy of his message and works.

Along with Moses' work of deliverance in an immediate sense, we also see Yahweh, through Moses, establishing Israel as continued chosen people through the giving of the Law, the establishing of ceremonial worship, and perhaps most important, the foreshadowing of Christ and his salvific work.¹¹

All of this work of Yahweh is through a man who was a shepherd, a person used to being in the midst of and leading creatures who need guidance, protection, and things to live. In many senses, Moses' work of shepherding did not stop after he left Midian. Rather, in his prophetic office and in his public work and teaching, we see that same spirit of shepherding throughout the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness.

The notion of Yahweh calling shepherds in the midst of His people is not limited to Moses. In fact, some of the most prominent prophets and people in Old Testament were shepherds. Consider David. Before he became the King of Israel, he was a shepherd.¹² Yet, in his vocation of Shepherd the Lord anointed him in the midst of Israel and was with him as he established his rule. Even though David transitions away from being a shepherd according to his earthly vocations, his pastoral experiences are very manifest in his Holy Spirit inspired writings, chief among them Psalm 23.

Though David was not a priest in the manner of Aaron and his descendants, David still served in the public proclamation of God's word through his penning of much of the Psalter. It is in this work where we also see David serving a prophet¹³, much in the same manner as Moses. The prophet Amos serves as yet another example of the vocation of Shepherd and prophet interacting through God and His immediate call. When we look at Amos and his public preaching, not only was it reserved for Israel in that time and place, but it also was for the church as a whole throughout the centuries.¹⁴

⁸ Exodus 2:1-2

⁹ Footnote three deals with the establishment of that Office.

¹⁰ Examples of these include the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the reception of the Ten Commandments, and the glory of Yahweh radiating off of his face after an encounter with the Lord.

¹¹ Cf. Numbers 21:9; John 3:14

¹² I Samuel 17:15

¹³ Psalm 22 and it's looking ahead to Christ and His suffering on Good Friday is an especially striking example of this prophecy coming from King David.

¹⁴ Acts 7:42-43; Acts 15:16-17

As we conclude this opening section, it is undeniable that there is a deep connection between, the call, shepherding, and the public proclamation of Law and Gospel, judgement and grace throughout the entirety of the Law and the Prophets and the Psalter. Though the Task Force report examines the descriptor of shepherd in the New Testament, it is clear that the roots of the Lord using shepherds to fulfill the prophetic role and call of public proclamation of the work of Yahweh and Christ is woven into the very fabric of Israel's history and story as they set the stage for the coming of Jesus and His salvific work for Israel and the world.

The New Testament and Early Church

There is much discussion in the Task Force report concerning the New Testament treatment of the Office of Public Preaching.¹⁵ Rather than rehash some of the finer exegetical arguments and examination, we will continue our narrative look at the Scriptures to see how the right call manifests itself across the biblical narrative, specifically in the New Testament. We have seen the role of shepherds in the called, prophetic office within the Old Testament, which shows a consistency of the Lord in how He communicates and appoints people across many different times and circumstances. The idea of God appointing and rightly calling shepherds, figurative and literal, for His people is undeniable. In this next section, we pivot slightly to look at a couple of narrative examples of the right call into public ministry within the New Testament.

Our first stop within the New Testament narrative concerning the consistent utilization of rightly called people to publicly proclaim the Kingdom of God and work within his people comes to us in a recent lectionary reading¹⁶: Luke 10: 1-20. The immediate context of this passage comes at an interesting juncture of Jesus' ministry. In the prior chapter we have Jesus sending out the twelve apostles, their return and the subsequent feeding of the five thousand men. We have Peter's confession, Jesus foretelling his death and the telling of all present to take up their cross and follow Him. We have the Transfiguration, another passion prediction, and an argument among the disciples. Finally, along the road a person comes up to Jesus and expresses a willingness to follow Christ, with the result that Jesus tells them that they must give up everything, including the ability to bury loved ones.

This chapter is a time of transition where Jesus, knowing that the time¹⁷ was coming close, was making His way to Jerusalem. The time of fulfillment was coming near and the Kingdom of God was at hand, with Christ making his way to inaugurate this work through His passion, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem. It is at this time that Jesus does something very

¹⁵ See footnote 5.

¹⁶ Proper 9, 3 Year Lectionary, Series C.

¹⁷ Luke 9:51

interesting. He appoints seventy-two people to go ahead of Him and proclaim the Kingdom of God and do miraculous works to show that indeed it was Jesus who sent them.

It is suggested¹⁸ that this work of Jesus was to point ahead to the future work of the universal church, to carry on the public proclamation of Christ and his work in conjunction with the work of the Apostles. As noted above, the apostles, having already been called, were sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Now, to help in his preparation and move to Israel, Jesus also sends these seventy-two. Within the narrative account of this Gospel, there is a definitive parallel utilized by Luke to show the call and work of these seventy-two as similar in form and function to what the disciples were called to do in chapter nine. Not only is the work similar, the linguistics of how Jesus does this is also similar.¹⁹

It is clear that these seventy-two were specially chosen and sent by Christ to do this public proclamation and the accompanying visible signs and symbols²⁰. In fact, to demonstrate the connection between their call and the continued work of the apostles, the word²¹ that Luke uses to describe this appointing (as it reads in the English translation) is also used in other parts of the New Testament in other circumstances to call another person into Ministry. The word makes its first appearance in the narrative in Luke 1:80. It is in reference to John the Baptist and the beginning of his public, prophetic ministry within the nation of Israel.²² The other time is in Acts 1:24, at the preparation to cast lots to show who would take the place of the deceased Judas.²³ Both of these instances we see called, public ministry as the focus and foundation of the usage of this word. It becomes clear that Luke's utilization of this word implies that this sending of the seventy-two is much more than lay ministry; that is, ministry that happens through the regular course of one's vocation. Rather, the sending of the seventy-two is a clear demonstration of the continued work of God through rightly called²⁴ and sent people to build the Kingdom and ministry of God in Christ Jesus.

There are many and varied parts of the biblical narrative of the New Testament that discuss more direct and clear examples of people being rightly called into public ministry throughout the course of the text, such as the calling of the disciples, the Apostle Paul, and

¹⁸ The Gospel of Luke. I. Howard Marshall. The New International Greek Testament Commentary, William Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1978

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Verses 17-19 give some examples of the visible signs and symbols that validated the ministry of these individuals. They include demonic exorcisms and the subjection of serpents and scorpions to these people as they carry out Christ's work.

²¹ anadeiknumi

²² "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his **public appearance** to Israel" Emphasis Mine.

²³ "And they prayed and said, 'You Lord, who knows the hearts of all, **show** which one of these two you have chosen...'" Emphasis mine

²⁴ Rightly called in this situation is through an immediate call by Christ himself, who is the head of the church.

Timothy. However, there are several examples of less than obvious instances where a rightly ordered call into public ministry is present. The example we will take a look at comes from Acts chapter 6.

Where we pick up in the story in Acts is at a time where the number of disciples of Christ is growing. There was a need for help within the church, especially for the Hellenists²⁵. Seven were chosen, among them Stephen, to carry on ministry. The focus of this ministry was carrying out the practical affairs of the church while the Apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word. In this sense, the men chosen here were Deacons, that is, men to serve in support of the work of Apostles.

Yet we also have to note something very important at the close of this section that shows not only a confirmation of a call into public ministry, but also lays the groundwork for the continued work and narrative of the Church as it moves through Acts and into its extended history, even being a foundation of life and ministry today. These seven men went before the Apostles and the Apostles laid their hands on them²⁶. This is significant as this is the visible demonstration of ordination into ministry. In fact, in every Lutheran Church across the world, this laying on of the hands is a cornerstone of the Ordination rite. Even though the primary tasks of these men were acts of mercy, they still had hands laid on them, essentially ordaining them into service in the church. Not only were deacons in this section primarily mercy oriented- they were ordained.

Immediately after the laying on the hands, that is, the consecration of these seven to work alongside the Apostles in the public ministry of the church, we see the narrative focus in on one of these men, Stephen. We know that the primary reason why Stephen was called to work publically amongst the people was for acts of mercy. Yet, in the laying of the hands we see the confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in these men and Stephen. Stephen, called and consecrated into this public work, also has the opportunity to speak publically in the synagogue concerning Christ.²⁷ This scandalous preaching of Stephen concerning Christ and His work of salvation as well as the changing of the customs of Moses leads to his speech before the Sanhedrin and his subsequent execution at the hands of Saul. Yet, the thing that precipitated all of these events transpiring, as well as this public proclamation of Judgement and Grace, is the calling of Stephen into ministry by the church and the Apostles and the laying on of hands by the Apostles, to confirm this public call into ministry.

This pattern of public acclamation and call into ministry of individuals by the church works in a very certain, consistent, and recognizable pattern. This pattern always is the work of

²⁵ Jews who primary cultural markers, including language, was Greek.

²⁶ Acts 6:6

²⁷ Luke 6:8-10

God, whether it is the immediate call of the shepherds and prophets by Yahweh, or by Christ as in the case of the seventy-two, or by the larger church and the Apostles as we have just seen with Stephen. This pattern continues throughout the New Testament, not only through the narrative of Acts, but also in the words of St. Paul to Timothy concerning qualifications and the establishing of people to serve publically, preaching and administering the sacraments to the larger church in the world.

As we move throughout the story of the church we recognize that this clear pattern continues. It is clear that early church carried on the work of the Apostles and the fulfilling of the Great Commission²⁸ through the pattern clearly set by God and the Apostles. The public ministry of the Word and the public acts of mercy continued on with the call, as well as with ordination. Caspar Zeigler²⁹, noted Reformation historian, thoroughly examined the practice of the early church concerning the diaconate, the Office of Public Ministry, and the church.

In his work, Zeigler demonstrates that continued model of the early church concerning deacons and public ministry essentially follows the pattern set forth in Acts 6 with the seven who were chosen for ministry. The diaconate served alongside and with those in the Office of Public ministry, and as a rule, they were ordained through the laying on of the hands. Specifically talking about the ordination of deacons, Zeigler relates Martin Chemnitz's words on this matter: "It is quite proper that the ritual of the imposition of hands was applied to this action... Therefore that in the ordination of ministers and in consideration of the usefulness and difficulty of that work... I say, in these circumstances, that it may be signified how necessary the special grace and blessing of God and in this way the prayer of the Church may be kindled and rendered very active and industrious according to James; the external ritual of the imposition of hands has been used."³⁰

Ordination, both in the Office of Public Preaching as well as in the Office of Deacon, who served as clergy in acts of mercy alongside pastors, was significant because it confirms a right call. This call is not self-directed, it is not an inward call based off of the desires or thoughts of the individual to serve. Rather, as Zeigler points out, ordination for the early church, even for deacons, "is a confirmation of legitimate calling through which the ministry of the church is commended to a called or suitable person for the performance of this duty, for this duty he is consecrated through prayers and the imposition of hands, is informed of his legitimate calling

²⁸ Matthew 28:18-20

²⁹ The Diaconate of the Ancient and Medieval Church. Translated Richard J. Dinda. Concordia Publishing House. St Louis, Missouri, 2014.

³⁰ p. 120-121

and is instructed solemnly and seriously publicly in the sight of the entire Church about his office.”³¹

Conclusion

The example of the early church is still valid for us today. There is a view of church history in missiology that breaks the history of the church into various epochs. The first epoch is “pre-church,” that is to say, the time of the Apostles through the early church till the rise of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. This time of the church is marked by the church being cultural outsiders, not an institution that is privileged and given a position of respect. The second period of church history is known as the “churched” era. This time begins in the fourth century with the declaration of Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman Empire and continues through the middle of the 20th century, where the church enjoys a privileged relationship with culture. The most recent epoch of church history is known as “post-church” and is the era we are currently in. This time is very similar to the pre-churched world, where Christianity no longer is privileged by culture and the cache in culture is waning or completely gone.

In fact, the church, much like in the earliest days, is persecuted by culture. In light of these similarities, the model of the early church, a continuation of the narrative laid out by Scripture, then becomes important. It is in this time of uncertainty, this time of hostility, that a clear understanding and witness of the public ministry of the Church and the accompanying visible signs, then becomes critical. The manner of identifying God’s public ministry through his servants in a right call and ordination become vitally important. It strengthens the public work of the church. It leaves no room for doubt, and is faithful to the ongoing and unbroken story, life, and work of God’s church and Kingdom, from the time of Moses through our time today.

³¹ p. 121

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