

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

These are anxious times, and I'm talking about for us, not about what's happening in the world. It's an anxious time for us because it's the start of another school year. It's an exciting time for the kids — most of them are probably ready to go back to school and see their friends. It's an anxious time for the teachers. Am I prepared? Is my classroom in order? What will my kids be like this year? And so forth. And it's an especially anxious time for LSUS because we have four new teachers and a new principal — everything is new for them, including perhaps teaching a whole new grade.

Today Abigail is being commissioned as a teacher and installed; yes, at school, she'll be Mrs. DeForest, but today here at church and for this rite, she has a first name. Amber — Mrs. Bahr — is already commissioned, but will be reminded of her commissioning as she is installed with mostly the same words. Those words will remind them of the great work of teaching in the body of Christ and the great responsibility given them as they assist parents in training up their children. Those words will remind them that being a teacher in the church means being a servant in the kingdom of the greatest servant of all. Those words will remind them of the importance of being a receiver of God's abundant grace that they may go forth to serve in the name of Jesus. And the words of Jesus, Moses, and the writer to the Hebrews today will be a bulwark against the anxieties that they feel now and will arise at times throughout the year.

To be a teacher is to be a servant. Anxiety is understandable, but Jesus doesn't want us wallowing in it. *"I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on."* Jesus says, first, don't be anxious about your daily bread. As a servant, you surely will not become rich like the rich fool in last Sunday's Gospel, but Jesus says not to be anxious about your daily bread needs either, and He gives four reasons:

first, life is more than food and clothing; there are more important things for His servants to dwell on;

second, God says that His disciples are important, more important than the birds that God feeds and the lilies that God arrays in glory;

third, all our fretting and worrying about such things don't make things better but distract us from the things of first importance;

fourth, the Father knows our needs, and as we heard recently, He is not one to give a scorpion instead of an egg or a serpent instead of a fish (Luke 11:11-12).

And so, as Jesus has taught us to pray: “give us the daily bread we need each day” (Luke 11:3), and He promises, “ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9). Yes, be fervent in prayer and trust in the goodness of the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Trust that, when it seems that your faith is too small for the task ahead, the Father will give you His Spirit to strengthen your faith as He has done through the ages for His saints, for Abel and Enoch and Noah, for Abraham and Sarah.

For us “*of little faith,*” “O Lord, hear us. We believe; help our unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Second, Jesus tells us, rather than worry about food and clothing, “*Instead, seek [the Father’s] kingdom,*” or as St. Matthew’s Gospel has it: “*seek first the kingdom of God*” (Matt. 6:33). Here are the servant’s marching orders. This is the *raison d’être* for our Lutheran schools, their reason for being. Surely, we want to be good at teaching our students their “three r’s,” reading, and ’riting, and ’rithmetic, but that’s no reason for a Lutheran school. Rather, we exist to preach Christ and Him crucified, to preach a righteousness that comes by faith in Christ the crucified, to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is what makes a school Lutheran, and this is what makes for a Lutheran school teacher. This gospel message must be part of every day; it must be evident in our teaching and in all our interactions with students and parents.

To be sure, in some states that is enough to deny a Christian school like LSUS state funds that allow students to attend. I wrote about that in the August Voice of Zion. That’s what they did in Maine: they would let state monies to go to a Christian school, provided it didn’t teach the faith. That’s what the Supreme Court said was impermissible for the state to do — treat Christians as second-class citizens when it came to receiving a “generally available benefit.” The Supreme Court got it. It wrote: “[E]ducating young people in their faith, inculcating its teachings, and training them to live their faith are responsibilities that lie at the very core of the mission of a private religious school” (*Carson v. Makin*, Syllabus, p. 4). God grant us faithfulness to the mission Christ has given us – to “*seek [the Father’s] kingdom*” in Christ Jesus, to seek it “*dressed for action,*” with our “*lamps burning,*” in watchfulness for the day of his return.

Third, Jesus tells us not to be afraid. “*Fear not, little flock,*” He says, “*for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*” The Father’s good pleasure toward us surely emanates from His pleasure for His own beloved Son (Luke 3:22), who became one with us in our flesh, God’s own Son taking on a servant’s form for our sake, even more who was obedient to the death of a cross (Phil. 2:5-8). Jesus is our Father’s perfect love in the flesh, a love that casts out fear (1 John

4:18), for, in Jesus, death is not the victor. Jesus conquered death and the grave by rising again on the third day, and it is the Father's good pleasure to make His victory our victory as a gift: "*thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Oh, how powerful this victory is when manifested also through God's people by faith. It overcomes the world: "*this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*" (1 John 5:4). Believers run the race set before us as victors, flanked on all sides by the great cloud of witnesses. We run with endurance because we are convinced of what we have not seen and are assured of that for which we hope: eternal life in Christ Jesus. We run without fear, little flock, even in the valley of the shadow of death, for the Lord, our Shepherd, is with us (Ps. 23:4), along with that multitude that no one can number waving their victors' palms and singing salvation's song: "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb*" (Rev. 7:10).

This kingdom of God, therefore, that we seek as of first important at LSUS, we also manifest in our lives of faith before these little ones in our charge. By His Spirit, by His grace, we bear witness to the faith we have in Christ — not just to God, but to Christ through whom we have access to the Father — and we bear witness by the godly lives we lead "here in time" and finally "there in eternity."

Fellow saints, a few anxieties are to be expected in this life, especially for our teachers as we start a new school year. We all experience suffering and trials, even as our "*brotherhood [has] throughout the world,*" throughout time. "[T]ake heart," Jesus says. "*I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). Therefore, may Jesus calm our troubled hearts and minds. May He give us peace as we come to His gracious table of forgiveness, and life, and salvation. His grace is sufficient for us. Let us come in weakness; come and receive His Body and His Blood; come be strengthened in faith and love as He gives us the kingdom; come and let His perfect love cast out our anxieties and fears.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.