

SERMON DELIVERED AT  
INSTALLATION SERVICE,  
Fort Wayne, Ind., May 1928

*Text:* And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. *Matt. 25.40*

In Christ Jesus Beloved Hearers, Especially Graduates of our Lutheran School for Deaconesses: -

Three years ago you entered our school with the object of preparing yourselves for deaconess work in the Lutheran Church. You were prompted to do this, I take it, by sincere love for the Savior, in order to equip yourselves so much better to serve Him in serving your fellow-men and especially to be helpful in saving souls.

It is not God's will that women should serve in the pastoral office as ministers of the Gospel. This service of the public ministry God has restricted to men. But women can and should be of help in the Gospel-service. Trained deaconesses especially can be of great service in the Church.

In our own particular church-body this branch of service has but recently been established; but it is by no means a new institution in the Church. In fact, we know from Scripture that there were deaconesses in the days of the apostles and that they rendered very valuable and blessed service to the cause of Christ. It is the example of those early deaconesses that you wish to follow.

To-day you publicly, before God and this assembled congregation, promise to serve the Savior in this office as long as it shall please Him to use your gifts, your talents, for this special work. In a solemn service you are being installed into the office of deaconesses, and the prayers of your fellow-Christians ascend to the throne of God asking Him to grant you fervent love and zeal to do your work, faithfulness in performing your duties, courage and strength in all difficulties, and richly to bless your labors for the salvation of many and unto the praise of His glorious name.

My object in addressing you is to be helpful, so that you may take up the duties of your calling with a joyful heart and do your work with a glad and willing spirit and thus be truly happy in your chosen profession. As a text I have chosen a word of the Savior which He will address on the Day of Judgment to those who in faith and love have served Him in this life. Speaking of the service which they

have rendered to their fellow-men from love to Him, He will say: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

What a wonderful thought to have in mind in the performance of our duties as Christians that our Savior and Master will address us in these words after faithfully performing the tasks He has assigned to us in this life! The world may judge the success of a person according to outstanding things which he has achieved: Christ will judge it by the service rendered To Him through serving others. Every act of Christian love and mercy done unto others, whether it seem great or small in the eyes of men, Christ regards as a work of love done unto Him.

And in your chosen profession there is so much opportunity for service. Our Savior needs trained workers and also trained women workers; in fact, there is much work to be done in Christ's kingdom that can best be done, yes, much that can only be done, by women who are trained for the work. In our foreign mission fields the Gospel cannot be brought to the women by our regular missionaries, who, because of the customs of the land, can have no access to them. There is also much work for trained woman workers in our city missions and in our large city parishes. We need trained women for the work in charitable institutions, in hospitals, old people's homes, orphan homes, etc. The urgent requests for deaconesses that are continually coming to us plainly show the need of such workers. You may rest assured that the time shall never come when there will be no work for you to do. If we had many times more graduates than we have, the danger of having no work would never confront you. There is most necessary work for you to do.

And it is a most blessed work in which you will be engaged. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren," Jesus will say to you on Judgment Day. Much of your work will be among those who are considered the least of Christ's brethren: the poor, the needy, the destitute, the sick, the unfortunate, the forsaken - people who are sorely in need of help, sympathy, and love. Indeed, that is blessed work. The world may take little notice of your work; it will mostly be work carried on in a quiet, unostentatious way; it may at times seem to become monotonous. But many a person will bless you for your love and kindness, will be exceedingly thankful to you for your ministry of mercy, and what you have done unto the least of Christ's brethren here will be recorded in heaven; for, if you are believing Christians, you will do it unto Christ. "Ye have done it unto Me," the Savior will say to those who have done deeds of mercy in the proper Christian spirit. You intend to go out to do the works of your calling in that spirit. Your heart's attitude to Christ is that of thankful love. You are saying to the Savior: -

Thee will I love, my Life, my Savior,  
Who are my best and truest Friend.

And you will add: -

Thee will I love,  
Not for the hope of high reward,  
For Thine own sake, O Light Divine,  
So long as life is mine.

This love of the Savior, which finds expression in deeds of mercy, flows from faith in Christ. You would do unto Him whatever you do unto the least of His brethren. You have learned to know Him as your best and truest Friend, as your Savior, who has laid down His life for your redemption and for the redemption of all men. You know Him as the Friend of souls, who has sought you and drawn you unto Himself. You know that for His sake, through faith in Him, you are children of God and heirs of eternal life. In this faith you have that peace and joy which the Savior alone can give. You are happy in knowing that you are God's dear children for Jesus' sake. You are of the mind of the author of one of our hymns who says: -

My heart for joy is springing  
And can no more be sad,  
'Tis full of mirth and singing,  
Sees naught but sunshine glad:  
The Sun that cheers my spirit  
Is Jesus Christ, my King;  
That which I shall inherit  
Hereafter makes me sing.

You would prove your love to Him by active service. You can serve Him only by serving your fellow-men. That you will do. No matter how lowly your service may be, that gives it worth, that makes it glorious and blessed work, that it is done unto the Savior.

And in still another respect your work will be done unto the Savior. Your one great, outstanding purpose in all the work you will do will be the saving of immortal souls, to gain or reclaim for Christ souls that He has purchased with His blood. For this you were especially trained; that is the great, the all-determining purpose in your work: to be helpful in winning souls for Christ's kingdom, leading sinners to salvation. In all your work, also when ministering to the physical needs of the sick and suffering, your object above all else will always be the welfare of souls, the salvation of those whom you serve. There is no work that is more blessed.

And if you will ever feel the need of an incentive to enthusiasm for your work, to zeal, to faithfulness in performing your daily work, go to the Gospel of Christ; let it bring to your remembrance what your Savior has done, is doing, and in future will do for you. When you recall that to your mind, you will, I dare to say, be filled with new determination to be steadfast and immovable, to be faithful and zealous, and always to abound in the work of the Lord. And since you need His help and support in all your work, seek it daily in prayer.

And when you have thus labored for the Lord's cause, being a blessing unto many and truly happy because you are privileged to serve the Savior in your life-work, then, finally, the time shall also come when the Savior shall graciously receive you into His eternal home, where with a special reward of grace He will prove to you that no act of kindness done for His sake, ad though it seemed ever so insignificant, has been overlooked or forgotten by Him.

And let us all, my beloved fellow-Christians support the work of our deaconesses with our prayers and gifts. Let us also remember these graduates in our prayers, asking God to be with them, to give them wisdom and strength for their work, cheer them in their trial, fill their hearts with love and zeal for their duties, and bountifully bless their labors to His glory and the salvation of many souls. Amen.

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