

SERMON PREACHED AT THE INSTALLATION
OF LUTHERAN DEACONESSSES
AT WATERTOWN, WIS

May 5, 1929

by Rev. William T. Naumann

PSALM 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path"

The occasion that has brought us together in the House of our God this afternoon is the Graduation and Installation of a class of Lutheran Deaconesses from the Training School connected with our Bethesda Home.

The Christians of the Synodical Conference have only recently made a beginning of training and employing deaconesses. The name matters very little but the need of Christian women trained to assist in parish work, in mission fields, in hospitals and in institutions of charity has always been present and has often been felt very keenly. Those who promoted this comparatively new enterprise in our circles have been well aware of the fact that the employment of women workers in the church has its limitations and that a breaking down of such limitations would mar the Christian character of such institution. But at the same time they were fully convinced, that the eventual abuse of such an institution does not abolish its rightful use, and that with the help of God the work of Christian trained women in their proper sphere would materially increase the efficiency of our work in the Christian Church.

Whenever in the course of centuries the deaconess cause has been misused it was when the bishops and pastors have slept and when the people have ceased to watch and to pray and to let the Word of God be a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path. We, the Christians of the Lutheran Church, pastors and hearers, today anew make a solemn promise to God that also in this deaconess cause as in all our work we will be guided not by mere consideration of opportunity, but first and last by the Word of God. And we do not doubt that God will bless our efforts in this direction and that the Deaconess Cause will prove a valuable aid in the upbuilding of our dear Lutheran Zion in this country. It is impossible that we should fail having the Word of God as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

This truth holds good also in respect to our deaconesses themselves, to them that are in the field already and to them that are about to enter into the field: That they will only become and be a success and blessing, when they make the Word of God a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path.

When we speak of the Word of God, we mean the whole Word of God as it is found in the writings of the holy prophets in the Old Testament and of the holy apostles and evangelists in the New Testament. "Whatsoever things were written aforetimes were written for our learning," Paul says, Rom. 15:4. And we are to learn not only from the statements of doctrine or from the precepts found in the Scriptures, but also from the examples of the lives of the children of God described by the holy writers.

As the holy apostle in the letter to the Hebrews sets forth the faith and godly life of seventeen men and women, as a lamp unto the feet of his hearers so let me today set before you **the example of four godfearing women as a lamp unto your feet!**

Lydia,

Abigail,

Miriam,

Phoebe.

Lydia was, according to Acts 16, one of the first fruits of Paul's preaching in Europe. God called His apostle to Macedonia by a vision for the purpose of winning her and many others for Christ. It was Christ and Him crucified that Paul preached at Philippi. For he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ knowing it was a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Lydia was one of the women to whom Paul preached by the riverside. And we hear that "the Lord opened her heart that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul." She accepted Jesus as her savior and His merits as her righteousness. Lydia was "a seller of purple," she knew the value of precious garments; but henceforth

she priced highest the purple robe of the righteousness of her Savior. Lydia had **faith** in Christ Jesus. And what precious fruit did her young faith bear! She at once desired to serve Him, who had brought her so dearly with his blood, and seeing Paul and his companions were servants of Jesus, she spoke to Paul: "If ye have judged me to be faithful (that is, believing) to the Lord, come unto my house and abide there. "And she constrained us." We clearly see she considered it not only her duty but her privilege rather to serve these messengers of Jesus. And thus she served many others. The faith and love of this noble woman helped materially to build up the congregation in Philippi, which later at several times supplied Paul with means to continue his blessed work in other cities.

What an excellent example of **faith** and **love** for all Christian women and also, for you, dear, members of this year's deaconess class! To you also, the Gospel of Christ the savior has been preached. And God, I am fully persuaded, has opened your heart also to attend to the things that have been spoken to you by the servants of God. Continue as Lydia to have **Faith in Christ**. Value highest the garments of salvation as your most precious dress and costliest ornament! And let this faith in Jesus' merits be the never failing source of **Christian Love**. Look upon the work into which you are entering as a great opportunity to serve Him and to help in building His glorious kingdom. As Lydia's faith and love was a blessing to the congregation at Philippi and a great encouragement for Paul and his companions, so also your service, prompted by faith and love of Christ, will be a blessing to many, whose number is known to God only. To serve Jesus very often requires great courage and wisdom. Of such Christian virtues we have an example in Abigail.

Abigail is a woman character of the Old Testament. We read of her 1 Sam. 25. This woman showed great **courage** and **wisdom**. She is called "a woman of good understanding." She undertook a very dangerous task and acted at the proper time and chose the right manner and the proper words in her dealing with David. Her husband had insulted David greatly, and David in a spirit of revenge had commanded his servants "to gird on their swords." He was about to slay Nabal and his men. Abigail, hearing of David's intentions, at once went to meet him and spoke words to him, that caused David to drop his murderous plans and even to thank her for her interference. Abigail used the Word of God as a lamp unto her feet. She, in her address, reminded David **of the Word of God** spoken to him by Samuel, promising him to make him king of Israel. She asked him not to burden his soul with the sin of murder and self-revenge. While she thus warded off destruction from herself and her own people, she showed **great concern for David's spiritual welfare**. David fully acknowledged this saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." We see that Abigail, in a very difficult situation, displayed great courage and wisdom.

Dear members of the graduating class, let Abigail be a model for you in her courage and wisdom. In your future life and calling you will sometimes meet with difficult situations, that require courage, circumspection and tact. Cause yourselves to be guided by the Word of God. Let your most important aim always be: **the spiritual welfare, the salvation of the souls of the people**, with whom you have to deal. Never fail to point out to them the sure **promises of God** in all his dealings with us. Make it a point to stress the **importance of remaining faithful unto God and to keep their conscience unspotted**. If this is done by you in the modest way of Abigail, those with whom you have to deal with some day also say to you: "Blessed be the Lord, which sent thee this day to meet me!"

And in this your work for the Lord you should also show true enthusiasm and energy. This you may learn of another godfearing woman of the Old Testament, Miriam.

Of **Miriam** we read in the 15th chapter of Exodus. She was the sister of Moses and Aaron. That she was a valuable assistant of these two leaders of Israel we see from Micah 6:4. There God himself says to the people of Israel: "I brought thee out of the land of Egypt and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam." When the children of Israel had safely crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh and his army had perished in the water, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song unto the Lord: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation." And then we read: "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." Thus we see this godfearing woman was active in **holy enthusiasm** arousing a great multitude of other women to give praises unto God with heart and hands and voices. She made the right use of the gifts which God had bestowed on her, seeking the honor of God and the

spiritual uplift of the women of her people.

Let the Miriam of that first year of the wandering of the people of Israel be your example! Let the wonderful works of our Lord, who through Jesus has delivered us out of worse bondage and slavery than Pharaoh's, also fill your hearts with thanksgiving, that the realization of God's infinite Grace and Mercy may prompt you in **holy enthusiasm and energy** ever to be active in serving the Lord, not only with your mouth but also with all other members of your body. And let the honor of God and the spiritual welfare of the souls of people be your highest goal and you will be kept from the sins of pride, envy and jealousy, that brought a severe reproof and chastisement on the Miriam of later years, when she with Aaron her brother rebelled against the leadership of Moses.

Whenever godfearing women serve God and their neighbor in holy enthusiasm and zeal, this will redound to the furtherance of the people of God. Why, then, should not such a Christian woman willingly work also **under the supervision and by the express wish of an individual congregation?!** That this is possible and may become a great blessing we see from the example of Phoebe.

Phoebe was a godfearing woman of Paul's time. Paul writes to the congregation at Rome, chapter 16:1-2, "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant (literally, "a deacon") of the church, which is at Cenchrea. That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she has been a succorer of many and of myself also." We see from this text, that this woman was employed by a Christian congregation to perform such work as could be done by a woman, perhaps in nursing the sick, teaching the children or distributing alms among the poor and needy and that this woman was now sent to Rome to perform similar duties for the congregation of that city and that she worked **diligently** and **faithfully** in this capacity, assisting many members of Christ's body and especially the holy apostle Paul.

O, what a glorious example for all Christian women and especially for Christian deaconesses! Let this mind be in you, which was in Phoebe, that you give your time and energy to Christ your savior and to the church, which is his body, in order that you also may become succorers of many, assisting them not only in bodily but also in spiritual needs, that they may find Jesus as their savior and abide in him forever.

May the example of these and other godfearing women and all the Word of God ever be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path!

And let us not forget that **the words of our text are a prayer**: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." These Christian graces: faith, and love, courage and wisdom, holy enthusiasm and energy, diligence and faithfulness are gifts of God. Seek, therefore, these graces daily in fervent and earnest prayer to God and ask him to bless you in your work! The fact that you were installed on the Sunday called "**Rogate**" which means: "Pray ye!" may remind you of the necessity of such prayer.

May God ever remain with our dear Christian Church and keep her in the true path of His holy word and thus cause her to prosper, and to flourish to the honor of His holy name and to the salvation of immortal blood-bought souls!

Amen.

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