

*Sermon for the Ordination of Hoyt Paul Canady, III to the Sacred Order of Priests  
Monday, April 19, 2010; Christ Church – New Bern, NC  
Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 34:1-8, Philippians 4:4-9, John 20:19-23*

This is a great evening in the life of the Church! It is an evening for rejoicing and I say along with the Apostle Paul, “Rejoice, and again I say rejoice!” It’s my great privilege to be here at Christ Church to be with your Rector, Peter, Bishops Chane and Daniel and all assembled to see Hoyt Paul Canady, III ordained a priest in Christ’s one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. I, like many of you, know what a wonderful person is becoming a priest today. I first came to know Paul through his wife Emily as I began my field education at St. Columba’s in Washington DC during the fall of 2003. Paul and Emily had just been married a couple of months before. It is almost hard to recall those pre-Ollie days, but it has been a privilege to journey with them as our ministries have unfolded and to have them as friends- no really family. Thank you Paul for this honor.

***And now O God - take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think with them. Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.***

In our reading from the sixth chapter of Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we here that Isaiah cries out to God, “Here I am, Lord! Send me.” In the year King Uzziah died – Isaiah saw God. He saw God ... sitting on a throne ... with six giant angels around him ... each with six wings covering their faces and feet and flying around with their mighty wings. For Isaiah – well – it must have been quite a shock. If we really envision what happens in this passage, we realize that that is a story of holy terror. Indeed, to see God, to be given his Word, to be called to a level of sacred service, to be

entrusted by God with his mission on Earth – it's huge. Isaiah says that the angels surrounding God on High called out to one another saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." These angels are saying what it's all about:

Dwelling in and around and with God, spreading our wings in his service and praise, and seeking nothing else but. Then Isaiah says of himself: "Woe is me! For I am lost: for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." This prophet is telling it like it is for all of us: We can't and won't do what the angels do left to our own devices. That is why that angel touched Isaiah with a sacred ember and cleansed him. Because like Isaiah, even more so you and me, we need God alone to make us right. We need God to send for us, to reach for us, to find us and heal us when we fall away. This is why Isaiah cried out to God, "Here I am Lord! Send me!" Because he had been touched by the powerful righteousness of God, and it stirred up within him the unbearable urge to answer God's call and to serve God.

What is it like to be called by God? The call comes - not necessarily by an audible voice speaking your name, though it can happen - more probably it comes through an inner conviction that grows inside you, a nagging - which you can't shake - that you are to put the service of God above everything else. Your response is, "Here I am Lord! Send me." You find yourself setting out on a

lifetime journey following God in faithful obedience; drawn to word and sacrament and worship. You speak the words of the service with sincerity and conviction, not only meaning it in your heart, but by living it month after month, year after year, for the rest of your life. And each week as you join with the gathered community - you greet as many of the people as you can, warmly and affectionately, taking a real interest in all the little details of their joys and sorrows. You visit sick in their pain and hope and fear, and drawing those around you into the presence of God through a gentle and heartfelt prayer. You work creatively to address the needs in your community, and literally cry out to correct injustice and to help the poor. You are committed to a life of prayer, and regular and careful study of the Bible, so that others seek you out for an in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures.

Wherever you go, you are known as one whose life is devoted to God, never being afraid to encourage others to come to church, and to live lives of faith and commitment. And then if you can imagine that there is a solemn rite, a joyful gathering where everyone present prays for you, and where the hands of the Presider bring upon you the sign that the Holy Spirit of God is filling you, and enabling you, and strengthening you, and is never ever going to leave you!

What an immense moment and gift it all seems to be. Although it may appear that I am refereeing to Paul's individual call or this evening's service, some of you may be surprised to learn that I am really speaking about Baptism; when we are made members of Christ's body and ministers of the Church – bearing witness to Christ wherever we may be. In this ordination tonight, Paul is not about to *begin* a life of engaging in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, of prayer, Bible study, caring for people, and a life of service. No - that is what he has been called to do since his baptism, and that is what all of us, lay and Clergy alike are always called by God to do. At our baptism we learned the truth about ourselves and how God wills us to live. The echo of the response, "We will" said at Paul's baptism by the congregation that promised to do all in their power to support his life in Christ *rang out again this night* only moments ago when we - the gathered community were asked if we would uphold him in his ministry as a priest of the church. Paul - you were sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. And Christ's presence this night is palpable. In fact, Christ is as fully present here and now as he was in the upper room on the evening of the resurrection when he breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:22) Because of the presence of Christ, there is far

more going on tonight than meets the eye. At this ordination, we are encouraged to be thankful about the past, for what has gone before, and what has lead up to this moment as we prayerfully call upon God's Holy Spirit to be in our midst.

It is that Spirit resting on Paul that will make the ministry of the priesthood possible. Because of the work of the Spirit, Paul will bless and absolve in God's Name and take up the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament. The Spirit working in and through and yes sometimes even in spite of Paul will make Christ present in such a way as to equip the saints for ministry.

Jesus calls us to serve him by teaching the Gospel, by preaching the Gospel, and by healing with the Good News that God is reaching for us, and has reached for us, and in Christ has found us. My dear brother Paul - don't be anxious – for you can trust that God's power is available to you – and that God's peace alone *can* and *will* keep your heart and mind in Christ – and that being in Christ is the only place to be – if the work of Christ is the work you feel called to do.

I'd like to share with you these words of William Countryman: “Take your priesthood more seriously than your ordination. Nothing can surpass the gifts bestowed on you in birth and interpreted through baptism. By this priesthood, we live the truly human life in human community, giving and receiving the

gifts that make us human. You will need the priesthood of others, and they are likely to be members of the laity as of the clergy.... Nothing should seem to you more attractive and desirable than to participate in that beautiful interchange of gifts.” \* [Page 193]

So my friend do all that you can to live in the moment. Be confident of the love of Jesus Christ, and his constant call and presence in your life. Remember always to love God’s people particularly when it is the most inconvenient to do so – don’t worry for God will guide you. Try not to take yourself too seriously! Listen to Emily. If she says you are you are spending too much time at work you probably are because she has worked in and for the Church and she knows. Work hard, work smart but above all work and serve with joy!

We are gathered here tonight because we believe that the Holy Spirit has been leading you to this threshold since the day of your Baptism. As a priest in God’s One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church – you will be a witness, a leader, a preacher, a follower, a servant of Jesus Christ – entrusted with the sacraments and sacramental rites of Christ’s church – and as such you must submit, your mind, and your heart to Jesus – because if you do – by your life – Jesus is *gonna* get some work done. Paul - may you be a true ambassador for Jesus Christ, a faithful steward of the mysteries of the Gospel, and faithful to your vows for the rest of

your life. Now is the time, this is the night, to you who has said,  
“Send me” I say to *you - go!* Go to the altar of God, the God of all  
our joy and gladness.

In Jesus' name may all of God's people say, Amen.

**\*Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All - Louis William Countryman**