

In the Name of Jesus

January 22, 2017 – 3rd Sunday after Epiphany (Church Council Installation)

Text: Colossians 4:17 – THE POSITION OF OFFICER IN A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

Scripture Readings: Matthew 20:20-28, Colossians 4:2-16

Hymns: 279, 342, 703, 492

Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.”

In the name of our crucified and risen Savior, the Head of the Church, dearly beloved of God, especially those of you elected to serve on the St. Paul Church Council:

At last Sunday’s Annual Meeting a number of men in our midst were chosen to serve in various leadership positions in our church. It’s our time-honored custom to install them into office in a ceremony in the worship service on a Sunday soon following the Annual Meeting. We will do this later on in this service. This is done in keeping with good order in the church. Also, to emphasize the importance and the sanctity of the work which the Savior has called them to do in His name.

The text that I just read for you is a brief verse but very rich in content. Let us delve into it with a prayer that the Holy Spirit help us mine out precious gemstones for our marveling, and for the spiritual blessing of our congregation and those the Lord has called to serve as leaders in His church. Our theme, based on this text, is: THE POSITION OF OFFICER IN A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION: an exceedingly great and important work in the Lord! Rejoice and praise God for calling you into this blessed work!

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Our text is taken from Paul’s letter to the Colossians. He is addressing Christians living in the city of Colosse, located in the province of Phrygia in Asia Minor (today we’d call it southwestern Turkey). An interesting detail about this church: it appears that, either because it was a large church and had outgrown its regular meeting space, or more because of the dangers Christians faced in those days when they met publicly for worship, they were assembling for worship in the homes of members. We learn this from verse 15 where Paul sends his greetings “to Nympha and the church in her house.” Also from his letter to the Colossian church member, Philemon, where he wrote: “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker ... to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home, grace to you and peace ...” (Philemon 1-2).

We can also notice how Paul makes mention, in his letter to Philemon, of the same Archippus whom he mentions in our text, describing him as “our fellow soldier.” From this we may deduce that Archippus had been chosen by the Christians in Colosse to fill a leadership position in their congregation (either as an elder or deacon or perhaps even as a pastor). By the term “fellow soldier” we may also deduce that he was a Christian who had been contending earnestly for the faith. He was a defender of the Truth of the

Gospel in the face of false teachings that were being spread. Archippus was a devout member of the Colossian congregation, blessed by the Holy Spirit with eagerness to worship and serve his Lord and Savior Jesus.

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Returning now to our text we want to notice that Paul underscores for Archippus the importance of the work for which he had been elected by the Colossian congregation. He says: **“Tell Archippus: ‘See that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.’”** From those words – “in the Lord” Paul was underscoring for Archippus the heavenly truth that the Lord Jesus Himself had chosen him for his work.

The same is true for those elected to serve in leadership positions in Christian congregations today. They receive their positions from the Savior! They don’t run for office. They don’t carry campaign signs: “Mark for Secretary” ... “Wayne for Treasurer,” etc. The Lord of the Church puts Christians into leadership positions based on the spiritual gifts He has given them and which He sees in them. It’s true, church officers are elected through the voting process of the congregation but the Lord is behind the scenes directing things. Another passage that shows us this is Acts 20:28 where Paul on his back way to Jerusalem from his second missionary journey met on the shore of Asia Minor with the elders of the church at Ephesus and counseled them to “keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His blood” (Acts 20:28).

This is an important heavenly truth. What comfort and encouragement it affords – both those serving and those being served – to know that those elected to serve in leadership positions in the church are Jesus’ choice! This is why we always begin our meetings with a prayer that He would guide us by His Spirit so that everything we say and resolve may reflect His holy will and receive His blessing.

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Last week Friday was Inauguration Day, when the man elected to be our next president, Donald Trump, was sworn into the office (often described as the most important in the world). On this “Inauguration Day” in our church may we reminded that the office of church worker exceeds *by far* in glory and importance any secular position. (This is true of every work of Christian service, whether it be Sunday School teacher, organist, elder, the work you women do, any task a Christian performs in the church out of love for Christ, even janitor! Why? Because those who serve in the church are in the employ of the King of Kings who through His Word bestows blessings on people that have to do, not just with our temporal well-being/security/happiness but our eternal well-being/security/happiness. So that we might have in our possession the treasures of His forgiveness ... joy and peace in believing, eternal encouragement and good hope by grace. All thanks to the One who, in love, came into the world not to be served but to

serve us and give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

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When Paul wrote to the Christians of Colosse and instructed them to tell Archippus to fulfill the work he had received in the Lord he was also wanting to provide him with a spiritual pick-me-up and morale boost by assuring him that the work for which the Lord had chosen him *would meet with success*.

Jesus gives the same assurance to you who have been elected to various leadership positions here at St. Paul. As you labor for Jesus ... in His fear ... prayerfully ... making His Word your daily delight ... taking it as a lamp for your feet, know that success in our work is guaranteed! Just as Paul assured the Corinthian Christians: “Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58) ... just as the Lord gave success to faithful Joseph in whatever he did while he was living in Egypt (Genesis 39:3,23) ... as He assured His servant Joshua: “If you observe to do according to all that’s written in My Word, I will make your way prosperous and give you success” (Joshua 1:8) ... so He says to you!

It’s true: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1). Your work would be destined to fail if you relied on your own strength. But with the Lord’s strength, with His backing and authority behind you, success is guaranteed. He will use the labors of love you do Him for the blessing of His congregation and your own blessing as well.

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That we look to the Lord for strength in the work we do at church is important when we consider the great enemies we face.

- The devil, whose ambition is to hinder the work of the Church and undermine the work of Christians, and make it difficult as he can for us to carry out our work with joy. We see numerous instances him doing that in the Bible, when he tried to keep Jesus from going to the cross for us, when he made life rough for the apostles when they went out on their mission tours.
- We also need the Lord to bolster us because the world is our enemy. It has no understanding of the work God has given us. It seeks to exercise its evil influence on us and get us to give up serving the Lord when the going gets rough. One example of this from the Bible: In his letter to Timothy Paul reported the sad news that “Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10). The very Demas who, along with Paul, had sent greetings to the Colossian Christians (as we read in today’s Scripture lesson from Colossians (4:14)). It’s a powerful temptation for us too to allow worldly interests to so occupy our attention that we view God’s work as unimportant or too hard, so that we fail to carry out our work as faithfully and energetically as we should.

- Our sinful flesh is an enemy too. How strong is the temptation, when we don't see immediate results or tangible fruits from our labors for Jesus to think He has forgotten His promise to crown with success, and to "give up."

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In view these temptations and challenges we face, let us then look to the Lord and His strength! Let us know assuredly that as we abide in Him, as we continue steadfastly in prayer, using the opportunities He gives us for growing in the grace and knowledge of Him through searching His Word at home and at church, He will bless us with strength for our work. He will enable you, dear council members, to fulfill with joy the tasks He's given you as elected officers in His congregation at St. Paul, and to praise Him for granting you the privilege of serving Him in the all-important work which concerns the Church that He purchased with His blood.

We close with prayer:

Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all, for Thee.

Amen.