The Third Sunday After The Epiphany
January 21, 1973 - Installation of Rev. Jerrold Nichols
Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008

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IN NOMINE JESU

II Corinthians 4: 1, 5, 6 and 7: THEREFORE, HAVING THIS MINISTRY BY THE MERCY OF GOD, WE DO NOT LOSE HEART.....
FOR WHAT WE PREACH IS NOT OURSELVES, BUT JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, WITH OURSELVES AS YOUR SERVANTS FOR JESUS' SAKE. FOR IT IS THE GOD WHO SAID, "LET LIGHT SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS," WHO HAS SHONE IN OUR HEARTS TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST. BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS, TO SHOW THAT THE TRANSCENDENT POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US.

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TODAY we INSTALL PASTOR JERROLD NICHOLS as part of the STAFF and more especially as part of the MINISTRY of JESUS CHRIST in THIS PLACE. To you, DEAR BROTHER, we say "WELCOME! GOD BLESS YOU and STRENGTHEN YOU with HIS SPIRIT as ~~we~~ you STRIVE to FEED the LAMBS and the SHEEP of JESUS in THIS PLACE - - - that you may UPHOLD, STRENGTHEN and ENCOURAGE THEM in THEIR MINISTRY to ONE ANOTHER and to the WHOLE WORLD. You know and I know that THIS is the GREATEST WORK on EARTH - the WHOLE MISSION and MINISTRY of JESUS CHRIST - a WORK in which we are PRIVILEGED to SHARE - that beginning with our OWN PERSON and LIFE we may show forth the GLORY of the GOSPEL in the PERSON of JESUS CHRIST."

I am THANKFUL for this OCCASION - because it has FORCED ME to take ANOTHER and FRESH LOOK at my OWN MINISTRY. What is it that MOTIVATED ME to become a PASTOR? What is this thing that is called "THE HOLY MINISTRY?" What does it mean to be a "CALLED and ORDAINED SERVANT of the WORD?" And more important, how shall you JUDGE my

MINISTRY? How shall you JUDGE PASTOR NICHOLS' MINISTRY? What should you EXPECT of us? What should you NOT EXPECT of US?

St. Paul lays down the GUIDELINES for the CHRISTIAN MINISTRY in Second Corinthians 4. I reccommend this WHOLE CHAPTER for your FURTHER STUDY and MEDITATION when you go home today.

First of all, says the APOSTLE, the CHRISTIAN PASTOR is one who has TASTED GOD'S MERCY He has his MINISTRY "BY THE MERCY OF GOD!" He is one who has DRUNK DEEPLY from the CUP of SALVATION. He is one who KNOWS the PERSONAL AGONY of being a "POOR, MISERABLE SINNER" - - - - and at the same time he has ALSO EXPERIENCED the JOY of FORGIVENESS and the PEACE of RECONCILIATION through the SHED BLOOD of CHRIST CRUCIFIED for HIS SINS and for the SINS of the WHOLE WORLD. It is THAT - and it is THAT ALONE - that gives a DYNAMIC COMPULSION to his MINISTRY and LIFE. He is one who has PLUNGED HEAD FIRST into the OCEAN of GOD'S LOVE - - that LOVE which SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE. Therefore, he is FOREVER crying out in SHEER JUBILATION and exaltation about the GOOD NEWS - - - the BREATH and LENGTH and HEIGHT and DEPTH of the LOVE of CHRIST! NOTHING ELSE MATTERS. The Christian PASTOR is one

who SEEKS NO HONOR or REAL ACCLAIM for HIMSELF - - - but only the HONOR and the ACCLAIM of HIS LORD! "FOR WHAT WE PREACH IS NOT OURSELVES, BUT JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, WITH OURSELVES AS YOUR SERVANTS FOR JESUS' SAKE!"

I have been PASTOR of THIS CONGREGATION for well over 10 years now. And I am WELL BEYOND the point where I even TRY to KID or CON YOU into BELIEVING that I am someone that I AM NOT - - - some kind of "HOLY JOE" - - - or even someone with ~~even~~ a "TILTED HALO" around his head. Many of you KNOW ME as well as - or even BETTER than I know MYSELF. You know that I am a HUMAN BEING with HUMAN FAULTS - with HUMAN WEAKNESSES - and HUMAN SINS. I have NERVES and EMOTIONS like EVERY ONE ELSE. I ARGUE and I ~~FIGHT~~ complain and sometimes I even LOSE my TEMPER! There are times when some of you have even HUNG the PHONE UP on ME - and I DESERVED IT! But NEVER have ANY of you PUT DOWN the OFFICE of the HOLY MINISTRY.. You know and I know that it exists only by the SHEER MERCY and GRACE of ALMIGHTY GOD.....I have this MINISTRY in "an EARTHEN VESSEL" - - - and SO DO YOU, JERRY - - - a SINFUL CLAY POT - - - formed and fashioned ONLY by the CREATOR, as a constant DEMONSTRATION that the "POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US."

There is not a DAY that goes by that I do NOT NEED to KNEEL DOWN at the FOOT of the CROSS and CRY OUT with SIMON PETER: "I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD" - - - or with the Publican in the TEMPLE: "GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER" - - - or with the PRODIGAL SON: "FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND THY SIGHT." I NEED to do THAT - - and so do EVERY ONE OF YOU. But it is HERE that the EPIPHANY LIGHT SHINES - - SHINES "INTO OUR HEARTS TO GIVE the LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST." Here there is LOVE and MERCY and FORGIVENESS and RECONCILIATION not only with God but with ONE ANOTHER.

That's the WAY our GREAT GOD DOES THINGS. He picks the MOST UNLIKELY PROSPECTS - and turns them into HIS MINISTERS. I know it is SO for ME - it is SO for YOU TOO, Jerry - it is SO for any PASTOR who is WORTH HIS SALT. Just look at some of God's men throughout HISTORY. There is MOSES - a murdering fugitive from his own country - a man with BLOOD on his hands - a stammerer and stutterer whose brother Aaron, had to do his TALKING FOR HIM. There is Isaiah, who must have been a FOUL MOUTHED INDIVIDUAL - for when he had his VISION of "THE LORD HIGH AND LIFTED UP" with the SERAPHIM chanting their ceaseless "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD OF HOSTS" he had only 1 reaction: "WOE IS MY, FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS." There is Jeremiah, who when the Lord CALLED him. insisted

that he could NOT GO, pleading: "I AM ONLY A YOUTH!" I suppose he felt that ADULTS listen to him no more than they listen to YOUTH TODAY. There is Hosea, whose family life certainly left MUCH to be DESIRED - - MARRIED as he was to a prostitute.

Move into the NEW TESTEMENT and you find the same thing! There is MATTHEW - a tax collector - getting RICH from a CROOKED BUSINESS. There are JAMES and JOHN - HOT-TEMPERED "SONS of THUNDER" - greedy for positions of HONOR at JESUS' RIGHT HAND and His LEFT. There is PETER, who never forgot the LANGUAGE he learned as the "BIG FISHERMAN" - - - so that there came that fateful night in the COURTYARD of the HIGH PRIEST when he lifted up his fists and CURSED and SWORE he "NEVER KNEW THE MAN." There is PAUL - a little, shriveled up, hunched-back sort of a man - - sickly with his constant "thorn in the FLESH" - - former PERSECUTOR and MURDERER of CHRISTIANS - - - - a man with a SPEECH IMPEDIMENT which hindered him from speaking fluently: "I CAME NOT TO YOU WITH EXCELLENCY OF SPEECH," he said, "WHEN I MADE KNOWN TO YOU THE POWER AND THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."

They were all MEN, who like us Jerry, had TASTED MERCY and who HAD THEIR MINISTRY NOT in their OWN RIGHT but "BY THE MERCY OF GOD!" And that is what makes the

MINISTRY to which CHRIST has CALLED US a "HOLY THING." For it through the MINISTRY that the WORD of RECONCILIATION is PREACHED. It is through the MINISTRY that Christ's HOLY SACRAMENTS are ADMINISTERED. And that is the PASTOR'S JOB - to be a "SEELSORGER" - - - the CARER FOR and the KEEPER OF SOULS - - - NOTHING MORE and NOTHING LESS!

Jerry, if we can do THAT for these PEOPLE - - - then we will have FULFILLED OUR MINISTRY with FAITHFULNESS. For the CHURCH is ALWAYS GOD'S PEOPLE in ACTION - gathered around the event of CHRIST'S PRESENCE in WORD and SACRAMENT - and CALLED to be INVOLVED in the WORLD. That comes only - when we with WARMTH in our OWN HEARTS - bring them the MERCY that we have FOUND ~~in~~ and the GRACE that we have FOUND and the LOVE that we have FOUND at the FOOT of THAT CROSS of our LORD. We PROCLAIM NOT OURSELVES - "we PREACH NOT OURSELVES - but JESUS CHRIST AS LORD, with ourselves as your SERVANTS for JESUS' SAKE." Amen.