



The Ordination of Anthony Francisco Acompañado

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2020

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Reflection: Holy Ground

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Oh, how we have waited to celebrate this day. Though, I imagine, God has waited far longer for this day.

Anthony Francisco Acompañado is about to be ordained into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Thanks be to God! Hallelujah! Amen. Honestly – dear friends – that is enough today. But since you know me to never be short on words – I thought I might offer a few more.

We speak of God’s grace in this life. And yet for most of us, we find it difficult to define what God’s grace means for our lives. Unconditional love. Of course. But more. Forgiveness. Yes. But still more. A promise of eternal life. Sure. Enough? An unending welcome by our God. Yes, but more. The tender embrace of our God – regardless of our brokenness. Of course– yes – okay. And still do these words really share the power of God’s grace for our lives? Finally – I am drawn to these words: being loved without request and promised eternal life without restraint. This, for me, is grace. It is not mine to offer – though my Savior calls me to tell others of this grace. It comes from our God. It flows freely from the heart of our Savior. This grace – began in the heart of our God – longing for relationship with a creation that felt alone and frightened – God heard the prayers of generations of faithful but hungry people – and then God answered.

One night, God sent this grace in the care of an angel and the presence of God’s spirit to a young woman named Mary. This grace then grew in her belly and when the time was right, this grace entered the world to rest in a manger filled with hay in the crisp night air. And for years and years – this grace grew in the tender care of a mother’s arms and was lifted and love by the rough carpenter hands of a father. Until the day, this grace entered into the waters of the Jordan – met a man named John the Baptist and was baptized. And when this grace came out of the water, as the story is told, there was thunder and from the clouds a voice, “this is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And from that moment – this grace entered into the world in a new way – ready to share itself with all the world. Ready to do the work of the One who had sent this grace into the world. Ready to love, to live, to laugh, and to light the world with a reflection of God’s own heart. And this is where you come in Anthony Francisco Acompañado.

Who knew where this life God gifted to you would lead? We have known incredible joy in your time at Ascension as the Director of Faith Formation. We have found our faces covered in whip cream looking for M&Ms. We have worshipped in a barn on a farm. We have run mud runs and climbed mountains with you. We have ordered more pizza than we ever though junior high students would eat. We have shared bread and wine on beaches and in attics and by candlelight with high school students. We have navigated the rapids of raging rivers. And for a time, we even lost ourselves on the lakeshore as we wept at the loss of a young man named Fabricio. No one teaches us – prepares us – of what it will mean to lose a child in our care. When we drove home that next morning after Fabricio died, we carried the hearts of three adults and 15 students with us, their grief, our grief, enough to drag us to the depths of our own hell. It was that same day that we drove home that you found out you had been accepted to seminary. You looked at me that day and you said, “How is this possible... How could God still want me for anything after this?” And I knew, if you were not reminded of God’s grace in your life – even in that moment of deepest despair – you would run away again. Yet even in the midst of your grief, God’s grace overwhelmed. Fabricio’s parents, Jenny and Carlos, offered such grace to us in the midst of their own grief. And this community offered grace, more grace than we ever thought possible. And

we learned from that giving of grace. We learned to love. We learned to live. We learned to laugh. We learned to light the shadows once again.

This is your calling from God. And you should have no shortage of endurance for the days ahead – for love, for life, for laughter, for light – we are all here today, wearing our running shoes, giving witness to your journey to this day. Lord knows, we have heard enough stories of your running of races – your 5Ks and 10Ks and 50Ks and whatever else you have run – always in a direction – but I think we can all agree – all those races have not always been in the direction toward God. And yet this God we worship – never gives up. What is it you said to me halfway through our first half marathon...not, “good job Chris”...not, “you got this Chris”...not, “were already halfway to the finish”...no – halfway through our first half marathon – you said to me, “I have a cramp, go on without me.” Say what?! All this training you put me through – all these promises to help me keep my pace as to not exhaust myself and you have a cramp. And like any good brother in Christ, praying about what to do – I looked at your face and your hand holding your calf muscle and I left you in the dust. Because I knew if I stopped, I would never finish that race. And if I did not finish the first one, I would never do another one. And so I kept running – you taught me that.

You taught that same thing to a young man named Ryan, who did not know what it was to run with joy until one Saturday morning when you introduced him to the sport at a *Run for God* event here at Ascension and the kid took off running, left all of us in the dust, and never looked back. You celebrated that kid with grace upon grace upon grace – encouraging him, pointing him in the right direction, and teaching him the gift of perseverance in running the race marked out for each of us. You stood by his side in difficult days and reminded him of the grace of the One who called him into life and loved him in his most difficult and painful days. And you showered grace on his parents and his sister and this entire community of faith when he died. You could have quit the race Anthony – but you did not. Somewhere, deep within you, God was running after you. Calling you to love, to live, to laugh once again, calling you to light the deep shadows of pain in our lives and that is what you did for us.

I tell you these stories not to depress but to bear witness to the faithfulness of those who worship with you today – those you are called to serve – this great cloud of witnesses that surrounds you in this moment. I am not sure if God had this pandemic in the designs for this day of your ordination – yet here we are – with the greater cloud of witnesses surrounding us – loved ones who have gone before us, standing at the edges of this tent bearing witness to God’s grace in our lives. A tree stands in memory of Fabricio to your right. A tree stands in memory of Ryan to your left. And somewhere in the midst of this great cloud of witnesses gathered here today, stands your dad, Romie. Amused, overjoyed, and a little surprised you finally stopped running from God’s call on your life.

So, Anthony, what is next? Well, the book of John, chapter 13 tells us all we need to know. Beginning with verse 4, “*Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*” You see, Tony, this grace that came from God’s own heart – breathed new life in a manger, loved the outcast, laughed with the broken-hearted, lived with the sinner, and brought light to the shadows...after all of that – this grace crawled up a hill one Friday morning – this grace, our Savior, loved without request and promised eternal life without restraint – even to the point of death -and hanging on the cross – our Savior, offered God’s grace – God’s very self for you Anthony and for all the world. And this day – you are reminded that you are being set apart – to be ordained into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament to do as you are about to be charged: to care for God’s people, bear their burdens and not betray their confidence. To discipline yourself in life and teaching that you preserve the truth, giving no occasion for false security or illusory hope. To witness faithfully in word and deed to all people. To give and receive comfort as you serve within the Church. To be of good courage, for God has called you, and your labor is not in vain.” And Lord knows there will be days – when you think your labor is in vain. But keep running – God is not done with you yet and remember – God is not done with the rest of us yet either.

Above all, my brother in Christ, hold on to the hope that is within you. Remember what the prophet Isaiah says: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” And if the prophet speaks of your beautiful feet, even after all of your running, then be reminded that wherever you go – your feet stand on holy ground. Every hospital room, every dining room, every pulpit, every sidewalk, every river, every graveside, every backyard wedding, every sanctuary – all of it holy ground – so take off your shoes brother – it’s time to wash those feet and get them ready to bring good news. Thanks be to God! Amen. And again, I say Amen. And all God’s people said – Amen!