

**Installation of Fr. David Robert Green as Rector of St. Gabriel's Parish, Douglassville, PA
10 Nov. 2013**

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First, let me say what an honor it is to be here today for the installation of my friend, David Green as rector of St. Gabriel's Parish. And what a joy it is to be among all you good Swedish Lutherans. What's that? They became Episcopalian a couple centuries ago? Oh, man!

So much for that sermon.

Oh, look, here's another one. Maybe this one will work. Always have a backup plan.

There's a lot I could say about David. But I don't intend to say much, because this day is not really about him. There's not much I can say about St. Gabriel's, especially now that I find out you're no longer Lutheran. But even if I could, I wouldn't because this day isn't really about you either. What this day ought to be about is God's mission in Douglassville, PA and your place in it. That would be your place in God's mission, not your place in Douglassville,.

Do you know what God's mission is in Douglassville? I don't. I don't know this community. I don't know who lives here and I don't know what are their needs, and worries, and hope and fears. I don't know except in a generic way what God is trying to accomplish on behalf of the people whom God loves here in Douglassville.

I hope you do. Because I do know that God is calling you today to join in that mission; Jesus is calling you again today to follow him, to choose to take up your cross and continue his mission of healing and preaching hope and proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand, present, available. I know that Jesus is calling you to live according to the values of God's reign and to work at making sure that Douglassville, PA is a place where those values are lived out. I know that because that is just what Jesus does. I believe that God has a purpose for each one of you individually and for you together as the people of God in this place. And I believe those purposes are a vitally important for God's mission in the world. The purpose that God has in mind for you will make a significant difference in somebody else's life—and in yours.

So this day is not about any of you. And yet it is. This is one of the great ironies and paradoxes of being a Christian, don't you think? On the one hand, it *is* all about you in the sense that you are a unique creature. No one else in the world has your genetic makeup and your temperament and your life experiences and your circles of influence. No one. God's purpose for you at this point in your life comes from all those things flowing together to make you who you are at this moment. It's all about you. That's true for each of you individually, and it's true for St. Gabriel's.

And yet it's also not about you at all. God's purpose for you does not come from within and is not based on what you want. God's purpose for you comes from God. God is the Creator. God is the Lord and Master and Savior and Redeemer and Helper and Strengthener. Don't get me wrong. You *can* look within. Looking within is a good thing to do if what you're looking for is how God has made you, how God has put you together, what gifts God given you. But when we go looking for what God wants us to *do* with all that we are and have, then we need to look outside ourselves. We need to look to the One who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves. We need to look to the One who loves us with a love stronger than death and who loves those around us in the same way. We need to look to the One whose mission is to redeem the world and care for each person in it. It's from this One and this One's mission in the world that our purpose comes.

Across the United States today active Christians in every single denomination are worried about their parishes. No without reason. These are tough times for the Church. But here's another great irony. If you're worried about your church, the best thing you can do for your church is to stop

worrying about it and start worrying about all the people who live around it who need God's love, who need God's presence in their lives, who need hope and healing.

I didn't make that up, the part about if you're worried about your church, the best thing you can do for it is to stop worrying about your church. I heard that from Kelly Fryer. And when I repeat it to church folk I often get nods of approval. But for most of us when push comes to shove, we worry about our church, meeting our budget, filling committee and vestry positions much more than we worry about the people who live around us who need God's love, who need God's presence in their lives, who need hope and healing.

So, I'm going to try this again, only this time from the perspective of the business world. The congregation I serve is pretty small. We are able to pay me only a half time salary. That half time salary when added to my wife's income is not quite enough. Almost, but not quite. So I have another job. I sell life insurance. Here's my card! And here's what I learned from the company for which I work. One of the younger guys tells of the time when he and his wife were starting out and trying to build a business. They were really struggling. He went to the head of the company to ask for advice. The head of the company listened to him and said, "You've got to stop trying to sell insurance and start trying to just take care of the people whom you are visiting. Take care of them, and the money will take care of itself." Darn good advice. Ya think maybe we in the Church could learn something from that? I do.

And now, in anti-climactic fashion, I need to say something about David. He has some serious gifts. For one, he is a gifted spiritual director who has quietly helped all kinds of people. He has other gifts as well. Find out what they are, and put him to work using them.

But he's not good at everything. You would do well to find out what he is not good at and get someone else to do them. You should—and this is one of the great things about being a visiting preacher—I get to be very direct and then go home leaving you to deal with the consequences—you should commit to a scheduled periodic mutual ministry reviews in which you evaluate the ministry of the whole parish, focusing on what is God's mission in Douglassville and what role you are able to play in that mission. I'm going to repeat that because it's important. You should schedule a periodic mutual ministry review in which you evaluate the ministry of the whole parish, focusing on what is God's mission in Douglassville and what role you are able to play in that mission.

And now, even more anti-climactically, I thought I'd close with song. Lutherans like to sing, and the Lutheran hymns do a great job of teaching the faith. But what to sing? *A Mighty Fortress* maybe, but it's a bit over-used. Perhaps *Ein Lämmlein geht*, a lamb goes uncomplaining forth. No, wrong image for an installation. So I decided on this one. You might know it, and if you do, I invite you to join in. Ready? "Oh, you better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout; I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town!" Amen!