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Hurry Up. Give It Away.

Basking in the glow of the installation of The Rev. Erik Christensen as bishop of the Metro Chicago Synod of the ELCA last weekend, these words I heard him share in a sermon back in April continue to live in my heart and mind. He was one of many in the late 80's through the early 2000's who were removed from the official pathway to ordination in the ELCA simply because they identified openly and in public as LGBTQ. To respond to that and to support Erik and others the Extraordinary Candidacy Project was created. That was a parallel pathway that would pick you up when you were kicked out of the official process and walk with you through the steps and requirements towards ordination. That led to 18 people being ordained *extra ordinarily* (a term coined by the former bishop of Sweden Krister Stendahl) Or literally "out of order." Some churches bravely even called these people to serve as pastors in their churches. The issue though was that they lacked official standing. They didn't have credentials, only a call from God.

Back to Bishop Erik's story: He shared that when people would ask them "by what authority" they were conducting these unauthorized rites, these unsanctioned commissioning, and these extraordinary ordinations they would say a phrase attributed to Pastor Jeff Johnson: we are borrowing our authority from the future.

Our episode this week follows Jesus' cleansing of the temple. A moment of conflict and disruption that reveals just how often we too get distracted by so many things and turn away from what God is up to in the world. How often we forget the heart of who God is calling us to be.

The leaders of the temple now come asking Jesus questions about authority. "Who gave you your credentials?" "Who authorized your ministry?" "Who told you that you could do this?" To that Jesus presents a riddle and then proclaims that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into God's reign ahead of them. Jesus is secure in the authority that has been given to him by God. His authority is God's authority alone. Jesus then and now is much more interested in exercising that authority and enfleshing and embodying that authority then defending it or debating it or proving it.

You and me? We have a complicated relationship with authority. We create our own authority to legitimize what we are doing or our own agendas. We exercise our authority (earned or not) over others, to measure and judge ourselves against them like a ledger or a ruler. We use whatever

credentials we can present to let certain people in and keep others out. Sometimes that clout manifests through longevity, like how long we have been a part of a community. Even when it happens unconsciously. What are we communicating when we announce our presence to newcomers by how long we have been a part of a certain community instead of curiosity about how they arrived here? We grant ourselves authority that we then use to build real or imagined walls or requirements for access.

We do this through supposed authority gained through achieving a certain socio-economic level or by virtue of living in a certain part of town or kind of home, or having a certain kind of family, or vocation. Our centering of achievement and use of authority go hand in hand.

At the end of the day it's about proving. Proving ourselves. Proving our worth. Proving that we belong. Proving that we are successful or faithful or good enough. When we are in a posture of defensiveness we cannot receive the gifts of others or share our own very easily. When we live in this place our communities will just get smaller and smaller.

From the beginning though, Jesus has had nothing to prove even to the chief priests and elders. Back in chapter 3 of Matthew at the start of his ministry the voice spoke from heaven declaring "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Held and secure in that authority, reveling in that authority--- the authority that no one can ever take away he has spent his life and ministry exercising, enfleshing, and embodying that authority. Jesus' authority is based on who he is.

What does he do with this authority? Hear this from Paul: Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be exploited or held onto, to hold over others, or to cling to, or defend, or prove, but instead he emptied himself, becoming a human, taking on the form of a servant, and going all the way to the cross.

Again and again he exercises his authority by giving it up and giving it away. By coming as one who serves. By coming down to you and me. By making room for others. By drawing the circle wider. By forgiving our sins with a kind of unilateral declaration that seems foolish to the ways of the world obsessed with counting and tracking. By offering all that God could ever give to everyone in the vineyard no matter what time they arrived. By operating exclusively in the economy of grace where the last are first and the first are last and all get fed with enough for the day. He pours himself out for our sake. Still this morning he does that by giving all of his body and blood to us, hungry beggars who come with open hands and then we become what we eat. Taken. Blessed. Broken. Given away.

In a few minutes Remy will be baptized. Just as for Jesus so for her- God's authoritative voice will speak and echo throughout all her days. "You are my child, whom I love. With you I am

well pleased.” A word with more power than all the chattering arrows that seek to pierce and define.

Like her, you have died and are alive again forever. You now move with God’s authority. The same authority that rested on Jesus belongs to you. It is the only authority that will last. The authority meant to be given away. Emptied out. Shared. Multiplied. Authority to let go of all the things that lay hold on us and our neighbors. Authority to forgive sins and hold fast to one another. Authority to live as though God’s story and yours is not finished.

This was the authority they claimed. When they said “we are borrowing our authority from the future” they meant they dared to live animated by Jesus’s death and resurrection and the truth that God is always at work to bring that resurrection power into our own time and place so we might experience it in our flesh. That God is still bringing life to those on the outside looking in, the latecomers, the new arrivals, the left out, left behind, and even you and me. The authority to trust that resurrection power is still coming toward this community and that we have life to live and share and give away. My prayer is that we will continue to discover all of the new ways that that resurrection power is still encountering us and this place and how we all might live in the promise of new creation alongside one another as we forgive and hold fast. Because just like Remy, we are called and equipped and commissioned and blessed in the waters of our baptism, for such a time as this. So we might hurry up and give it away. Give it away and rise again.