

INSTALLATION OF PASTOR TYLER PEIL

Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 5:20-26

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees...”

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Let me tell you a story about this guy: his doesn't; the end. But the good news is he'll fit right in here, because yours doesn't either. Maybe that could be the church slogan. Imagine the brochures: *“Our righteousness doesn't surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.”*

Perhaps you think I'm wrong. Well, I know I'm not wrong about the Right Reverend Peil, but let's see if I'm wrong about you. The Pharisee praying in the Temple (Luke 18) tells God, us, and everyone who'll listen that he fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all he owns. Have your belts tightened and wallets thinned as of late? We'll have the offering plates soon enough, and I can bring a scale up here, but I think our conscience tells us more than they could.

Jesus tells us that the Pharisees diligently studied the Scriptures (John 5), albeit incorrectly. I'm sure you can study them just as incorrectly. But do you study them as much? How long does it take you to find a book in the Bible? Do you have to use the table of contents? Have you memorized more verses from the Top 40 than you have from Sacred Scripture? Hey, I'm not digging your grave here, so don't get mad at me. Jesus said: *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

A nicer man would stop there. Unfortunately, I'm not a nice man. *My righteousness doesn't surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law either*, so I'm going to go ahead and beat a man while he's down, kick a dead horse, and, while I'm at it, wake sleeping dogs up.

The Pharisees often made it clear to Jesus that they didn't do a lick of work on the Sabbath and didn't think He should either, even when it came to healing. Sure, the Pharisees misunderstood the Sabbath, but do you take the Sabbath as seriously, and, if so, in the way Jesus intended? How often are you in the pew? If it is often, good for you, but are you listening? Can you recall much of the last sermon you heard? The Lord doesn't like empty heads any better than empty pews. The Spirit doesn't sanctify one ear if He's quickly forced out the other. Gladly hearing and learning takes more than a padded pew.

Okay. That's enough. I'm not being nice. I know it. My wife's going to tell me so after the service. So let's move on. Let's look at the first lesson. I'm sure that'll be less awkward. Let's go verse by verse.

Don't love anything more than God, whether it has a President or brand name on it. Don't use the Lord's name like a throwaway word. Act like it's the Word of God and hear, read, learn, and take it to heart. Obey the government, even when it comes to the laws that don't make sense, ministers of the Word, even when you think they should part their hair on the other side, and your parents, even when they don't know anything. Don't hate, let alone kill. Pretend God created marriage, pants, and internet search filters for a reason. If it ain't yours, don't take it, and finders aren't keepers. If it isn't true, don't say it; if it is true but hurt's your neighbor's reputation, don't say it. Don't want what's not yours or what you shouldn't have.

So how'd you do? Remember, there's no curve on this test. Only an A+, and not an A+ like moms and preschool teachers give, but a real 100%, is passing. So, who's ready for the potluck?

Too often we think an installation is the wedding. It's not. The installation is the morning after. Christ has already wed you two together: Pastor Peil and St. John Lutheran. I know you've donned your best and tried to smile extra wide, but you might as well bring out the garlic breath and morning hair. You're married, and God feels the same way about divorces in the ministry of the Word as He does in marriage. We've already established no one here is Cinderella, at least not on the night of the ball, so there's no point putting on airs.

I suppose I was a bit hard on your new pastor. It's hardly the first time, but that doesn't make it right. He did do at least one good thing while he belonged to my congregation. You know what he did? It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. He took the offspring of my wretchedness in his hands, flesh of my flesh, buried the little rascal, and gave me a new sanctified saint, born of the Spirit. We call him Isaiah. He usually sits next to my wife when I preach. Pastor Peil put on the Father's hands and drowned the death right out of him, all by pouring water on his head. He put the sign of the cross on him, together with God's name, and suddenly Good Friday and Easter Sunday weren't just what happened back then or twice a year; Good Friday and Easter Sunday were here and now. Good Friday and Easter Sunday were Isaiah's. Sometimes when he's naughty I think we should baptize him again, but, then again, which of us couldn't use a good drowning now and again, and by now and again I mean every day. But enough about me and my son. Let's hear about you:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Sounds nice, doesn't it? It definitely sounds nicer than all that stuff I was saying before. It almost sounds like Good News. That's because it is—no more or less true than the law, and no more or less necessary, but certainly more comforting. Who wouldn't rather be brought to life than put to death?

Jesus died on a cross for your sins, but you can't find that cross. It's long decomposed or on display in a thousand papal churches, depending on who you ask. Jesus rose from the dead for your life, but you sure can't find that empty tomb. Some tour guide in Israel might say he can show it to you, but there's thousands of tombs and thousands of tour guides. The fact is that you can't find Jesus' cross to stand at it's foot, and you can't find Jesus' tomb to walk out of it, that is, unless God brings it to you, and He has.

And that's why Pastor Peil is here. He's the herald, called to announce the arrival of cross and tomb, of Jesus Himself, who comes to you in Holy Baptism and in Holy Baptism relived in Holy Absolution, who renews you with His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper, who speaks to you in the divine Word and in right preaching.

This isn't the perfect congregation. If it were, it'd be in heaven. But it is Pastor Peil's congregation, and he's going to have to live with it, because you are Jesus' gift to him, and Jesus' gifts always deserve a thank you. Pastor Peil isn't the perfect pastor. If he were, he'd be in heaven. But he's your pastor. He's the one Jesus has chosen to fill your ears and point your eyes. He's Jesus' delivery boy, called to bring you the Bread of Life, on time and prepared, not the way you want it, but just the way you need it, and you're going to have to live with him, because he's Jesus' gift to you, and Jesus' gifts always deserve a thank you. And so here is your recipe for success: as Jesus' gifts to each other, gather around Jesus' Gifts.

Tyler, the Body and Blood you pour down their throats opens your own lips to declare the Lord's praise. It's the Body and Blood shed for you. It is, or at least better be, the most important food in your lunch pail. Tyler, the water you pour on the heads of their children is the very water that brings fruit forth in the wilderness of your heart, and unless you swim in that water and refuse to come out, even when your hands shrivel with grace, you will have little to feed them. Tyler, the Word you preach is not yours. Sorry. Check you at the door when you step into the pulpit, and don't pick you back up on the way out. Take what you preach. Take Jesus, and if, God forbid, you don't preach Him that week, let that you hanging in the narthex be a reminder that you let your people down.

You are all baptized children of God. Children have a birthright. Jesus is your birthright. Pastor Peil is here to give you Jesus, to serve you every morsel of His buffet of grace and guidance. If you want something other than that, you don't want enough. You need Jesus, and Jesus died for you to have Him.

In Him, you have forgiveness. In Him, you have life. In Him, you have a reason to show up on Sunday morning. In Him, you are the people of God. In Him, your righteousness does surpass that of the Pharisees, because His righteousness is yours. And without Him—without Him, you're just a clubhouse with stained glass. You need Jesus. Always want Him, and be glad Pastor Peil's been called to deliver Him.

Tyler, Jesus has called you and made your feet beautiful. May your hands, like the widow of Zarepheth's jar, never run dry of the fruit of His cross, the oil of gladness! May your mouth, like the trumpets of Joshua's army, sound clearly with both warning and glad news. Tyler, son of Tim, I know you love Him. Feed His sheep. Amen.