

Extra Nos: An Ordination Sermon



Robin Small's Ordination at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, Ohio

Co-missioners,

A month ago, a servant of Christ named Robin Small was ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Bowling Green, Ohio. Robin had been serving at St. Mark's under the auspices of the ELCA's Northwestern Ohio Synod as a Synodically Authorized Minister. While doing so, she had also fulfilled requirements for ordination under an ELCA pastoral training program called TEEM, short for Theological Education in Emerging Ministries.

Robin's mentor throughout all this was the Rev. Rob Spicer,

senior pastor at St. Mark's. She asked him to preach at her ordination. Rob, a longtime friend of Crossings, was later moved to share the sermon with us. We're glad he did. Its central point is one that every would-be teller of the Gospel, ordained or lay, has got to bear in mind if what they say is going to be Good News and not the ever-popular Law-in-disguise that reverberates so strongly in churches these days.

Join us in prayers for Robin and Rob as they keep telling the Gospel in Bowling Green.

Peace and Joy,
The Crossings Community

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Extra Nos: An Ordination Sermon

by the Rev. Rob Spicer

Text: [Mark 8:27-38](#)

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

Robin, it is a joy and an honor to be here with you on this special day; to have your family and friends join with this congregation and the synod in celebrating all you have accomplished; and to be able to pray for you as you undertake the humbling responsibilities of being a pastor in Christ's Church.

It has been a blessing these last three years to have shared in this journey with you and the people of St. Mark's as we've discerned together your call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Now, as we celebrate today, not only are we celebrating you, but even more we're celebrating what you will be doing for us in the months and years to come.

And what you will do for us can be summed up in two little words. Words that are central to our Lutheran understanding of the Gospel. Words that are central to the message in our Gospel lesson today. Words that are central to the ministry of Word and Sacrament to which you are being ordained.

These two words are the Latin words: *Extra nos*.

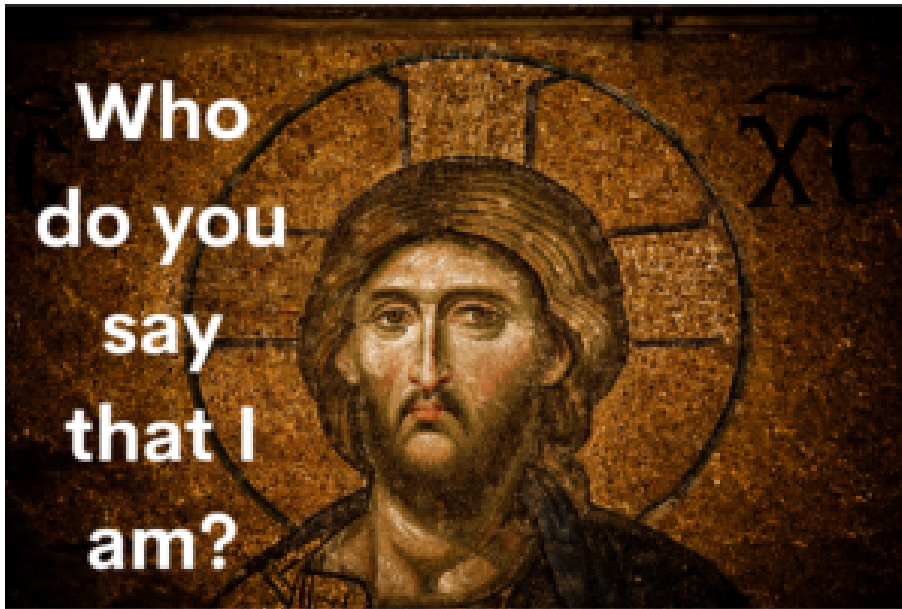
In English the words mean outside of ourselves; not originating in us, alien to us.

These two words were crucial to Luther's understanding of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in that we cannot save ourselves. Rather our salvation comes to us *extra nos*, from outside of ourselves.

By the same token, Luther says, any righteousness we have in the eyes of God does not originate with us, but rather comes to us *extra nos*. That is, Christ shares his righteousness with us.

As I say, the concept of *extra nos* is also at the very heart of our Gospel lesson today.

As Jesus has his Q & A session with his disciples, he reveals the infinite chasm that exists between the opinions generated by a sinful and adulterous generation, and the Gospel Truth that comes to us *extra nos*; from outside ourselves.



Who do you say that I am? (from Canva)

Jesus begins by asking his disciples the question, “Who do people say that I am?”

He is taking a poll. He wants to know how the court of public opinion has ruled on him. His disciples tell him that some think he’s John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the Old Testament prophets.

Of course, all of these opinions are wrong, but none of them is surprising. Because the court of public opinion always reflects the predilections and desires of the sinful generation from which it comes.

That is how sin works. It turns us in on ourselves. As Luther said, it turns us into navel-gazers.

If all we can focus on is our own sinful thoughts and desires, then our opinion of Jesus is going to reflect those desires.

For the sinful generation of Jesus’ day, the desire was for a fiery prophet. They wanted a strong leader who would stand up to the political and religious powers of the day the way Elijah had

stood up to King Ahab, or John the Baptist had stood up to King Herod, or the way other prophets had stood up to speak truth to power in their day.

That was their desire, and so that became their opinion of who Jesus was.

Which, of course, helps us understand why Peter got so upset when Jesus said he must be killed by the very leaders he they wanted him to be fighting against.

“That can’t be right,” Peter says. Why is Jesus not complying with what Peter and his generation want him to do?

Of course, such misunderstanding isn’t unique to Peter and his generation. What was true for them is true of all generations. Because every generation is just as sinful and adulterous as Peter’s was.

Which means that the court of public opinion in every generation is always going answer Jesus’ question, “Who do people say that I am,” in ways that reflect the preferences and desires of that time and place.

In case you are interested, a quick Google search will give you some of the answers offered by our generation today.

“Who do people say that I am?”

Well, according to the opinions of today Jesus was a socialist. A capitalist. A revolutionary.

He was a refugee. A homeless person. He was this or that skin color. This or that sexual orientation. He was a great moral teacher. He was a figment of our collective imagination.

All of these answers and many more can be found in the court of

public opinion today. I imagine that many of them can be found here amongst us today.

Not surprisingly, they reflect the predilections and desires of our own generation.

Of course, the problem with all of this is that, if we desire a Savior who is no different from ourselves, then he's not going to be much of a Savior.

So now we come to the second question Jesus asks his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?"

To which Peter responds: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

That is, Jesus is Immanuel. God with us. He is the infinite and ineffable God, the God who transcends time and space. He is the God who has come to us *extra nos* to save us from sin, death, and the devil, and our own faulty opinions.

In Matthew's account, Jesus responds to Peter by saying, "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven."

And so we have this moment of clarity. This light shining in the midst of the muddled darkness of the disciples' report about the court of public opinion and Jesus' rebuke of Peter for sharing those opinions.

Here, in the midst of all that confusion, comes this moment of clarity in which Peter declares the truth of the Gospel. The truth that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is quick to point out that this truth is not an opinion that has originated with Peter or his sinful generation. Rather, it is a gift, a revelation, that has come to him *extra nos*; from

outside himself.

It has come, Jesus says, from our Father in heaven.

Robin, this is why you are being ordained today. Christ is calling you to proclaim this Gospel Truth to us here at St. Mark's. Because we desperately need to hear it, and we are not going to hear it anywhere else.

Certainly not in the court of public opinion, and certainly not from within ourselves.

This Truth must always come to us *extra nos*. And you are being ordained, set apart, to do just that; to stand over and against us and proclaim this good news to us.

You are being called to shine the light of Christ into the darkness of our minds clouded by sin.

You are being called to cut through all the noise and opinions of our sinful and adulterous generation, and declare the Truth that transcends every generation.

The truth that: God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for us so that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.



Robin Small

Robin, this is the Gospel that Christ is calling you to preach and teach to us here at St. Mark's, because the saints in this place need to hear it. Faith comes by hearing, after all—it comes *extra nos*—and Christ wants us to hear the Word from you.

He wants us to hear it in every sermon you preach, in every baptism you officiate, and in every absolution you offer us.

Every time you elevate the bread and the wine of Holy Communion, he wants you to proclaim for us the gospel truth that this Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. This is the Father's gift, given and shed for us.

However, faithfully performing the office of ministry is not easy, because, like Peter and the other disciples, and like all the saints of every time and place, you, Robin, are a sinner. Which means you are just as prone as Peter and the rest of us to get it wrong.

And so we come to the cross. "If any want to become my followers," Jesus says, "let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me."

Robin, as Peter so painfully reminds us in our lesson today, it is all too easy for us to fall back into the familiar and comfortable opinions that originate within ourselves, or our generation.

So the saints of this congregation will be praying for you. We pray that each day you will be given the grace to take up your cross and die. Die to yourself, your opinions, the opinions of our sinful generation, and anything else that originates within you.

We pray that you, too, may know and experience the gift of the Gospel. The gift that can only come to you *extra nos*.

May that gift from our Father in heaven sustain you in your ministry, and may it always be the one gift you share with God's people here at St. Mark's.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus, forever. Amen.

Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use
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