

1 Peter 4:7-11

Eden Mennonite Church

December 7, 2008

Ordination of Pastor Gail Graber

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11

I'm going to read the text from First Peter with a little bit of dynamism to help us grasp and be grasped by the power of these words which are written to the followers of Jesus Christ.

Now the end of all things has drawn near. The ball in Time Square is poised to descend. The transfer of power to a new administration is incumbent. In view of that, church, what's your bucket list; what kind of people should you be?

Exercise good judgment and self-discipline for the benefit of your prayers. Above all, practice ardent, yes, even arduous love toward one another, because love covers a multitude of sins; your forgiving love for one another is the clearest demonstration that the dawn of a new age has begun to redden the horizon. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. And just as each one has received a spiritual gift, an empowerment direct from God, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's manifold grace; as skilled economists of God's mosaic of benevolence; as effective managers of God's panoramic generosity. Everyone who speaks, let that person speak as one announcing oracles of God. Everyone who does acts of service, let that person serve out of the strength which God supplies. Do everything for the purpose that God may receive an emperor's acclamation, the homage due the universal ruler, an inaugural celebration through Jesus Christ. Indeed, to God belong royalty and awe and reign for ever and ever. And all God's people said: Amen.

The Pastor's Bucket List

Pastor Gail, we celebrate you. You are a fulfillment of God's promise to his people through the prophet Jeremiah, "I will give you shepherds with a heart like my own. They will pasture you on knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15). Gail, you have indeed answered Jesus' call, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

"The Bucket List" is a recent movie with Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson. Two old men with terminal illnesses decide to do the things they've always wanted to do before they "kick the bucket."

First Peter tells us, its bucket list time *for everybody*. "The end of *all things* has drawn near." Exactly how many pages are left on the calendar is beside the point. For the followers of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of this world has crested the hill; it's on the downward slope. It's time to take seriously the fact that everyone, *even earth itself*, is terminal. In view of that, what's it all about, what's the heart of the matter, what's the real meaning of life? As the clock ticks down, what kind of people shall we be? What's on the pastor's bucket list?

Gail, as pastor, you are called by God to be authentically human. You receive and proclaim the good counter-cultural news that our dignity and worth as persons is not achieved but given, given by a loving Creator who forms us in the very image of God. And when we embrace that original *blessing*, we find that the *recovery* of God's image in us is also not achieved but given and that is what we call *grace*. And Gail when you can get your flock to know grace *experientially*, you can retire, because you'll have nothing left to preach.

As pastor, you are called to be a *differentiated* leader. And Jesus is our model. When there are still needs, Jesus withdraws to pray; when Peter says, "Everyone's looking for you," Jesus says, "Let's move on." These things too are on the pastor's bucket list.

To be pastor means to give and receive hospitality—welcoming and being welcomed to holy ground, to what Celtic Christians call “thin places,” where the membrane of heaven is porous and the Spirit seeps through; where we remove the sandals of the self and touch the divine with our bare so(ul/le)s, where our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his Son (1 John 1:3). Gail, you have experienced visits like that—surrendipitous—tinged with the flutter of wings and the echo of monastic chants.

Of course pastors face challenges. First Peter doesn't mince words: Christians are aliens in society, and they are supposed to be. Gail, you are to call yourself and others to be imaginative misfits in the world as it is; to be settlers of God's new world.

The church needs pastors who will help Jesus wreck peoples' lives; to peck through the shell of insulation and apathy; to liberate them from the identity theft of consumerism. We need pastors who will free our young people from the room of mirrors, the menagerie of distractions; to help them wreck the boredom and irrelevance of the church as it is and reclaim the hard and beautiful simplicity of following Jesus in life; that is the great bequest of our Anabaptist forbears. Gail, help them liberate their imaginations so they can feel their thirst for Jesus. We need pastors who will help transform members into missionaries; who will lead the church to partner with God's mission to bless all the families of the earth.

This church that you pastor is facing a major challenge. It stands at the crossroads. The internal task of Eden Mennonite Church is for a wise and faithful older generation to give its sincere blessing to the younger generations; to release them to the Spirit's guidance for doing church in a way that fits a new day.

Gail, you are ordained by God through this community of believers. And this entire community is endowed with God's gifts. First Peter is clear that God has entrusted gifts to "*each one*," not just some elite "A" team, clerical or otherwise. "*Each one*" is a steward, an *oikonomos*, an economist of God's sacred trust to them. When we speak, we become God's voice to one another; when we serve we render God's own service. In God's organization, there are not executives and drones. *All* are managers. In such an arrangement, pastors are the conveners, coordinators and encouragers of the managers. And the variety of gifts to serve the many needs of the faith community is a direct reflection of God's manifold grace, God's diversified benevolence, each empowerment a tile in God's mosaic of generosity.

Gail, you identify strongly with the role of servant and that is good. Be clear *whose* servant you are. The pastor is first and foremost a servant of Jesus Christ, for the church belongs to him.

But perhaps the most important item on the pastor's bucket list is this: Pastoring is the experience of self-helplessness. We should do what we can to improve our knowledge and skills, yet we will remain hairless Samsons. Gail,

I'm not OK, you're not OK, none of us are OK, but that's OK because God's strength is made perfect in pastoral weakness, God's power fills clay jars, Jesus will increase in our decrease.

And through it all you, Pastor Gail, will grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be an emperor's acclamation, now and forever. Amen.

My Response

Truly God blesses me. I am humbled by your presence here today. You have nurtured me, taught me, and embraced me. God has shown me that anything is possible when we say "OK Lord, show me what you want me to do." As I think about my journey to this moment, I recall the first sermon I preached. Oh not here at Eden - not even in a church. It was in the kitchen of my childhood home - when no one else was home, of course.

I believe I was in about the 7th grade, the country was mired in the Vietnam War and I delivered a passionate sermon about the horrors of war and the ridiculousness of our country sticking our nose in where it didn't belong. God did NOT want us to be at war. It was well over 30 years later till I preached another sermon. It was many years past my 7th grade tirade that someone said to me, quite out of the blue and out of context, "When are you going into the ministry?" I largely sloughed off and ignored that remark. But recalled it a few years later when, because of the strong leading of the Holy Spirit I found myself in a seminary Formation in Ministry class taught by Walt Friesen, the same man who had asked me the ministry question a few years earlier.

Upon obtaining my undergraduate degree I received four graduation gifts that had printed on them these verses from Proverbs. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." Those verses became my daily prayer. I am deeply grateful and continually amazed at what the Lord has done in my life. I am so thankful for parents who modeled priorities of faith and family even in difficult times. Their solid, unwavering trust in God was the foundation for my own faith formation. I am grateful for a husband, sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and extended family who have and who continue to support me. In addition, the care and nurture I received from this congregation as a child and young adult also helped lay the groundwork for answering a call to ministry. Your opening your hearts to me and inviting me to

be one of your pastors here is both humbling and exhilarating. The sharing of your stories with me as we visit is truly a blessing. I thank God for you and for His love and mercy to each of us. To show my care and appreciation for you, The Eden Mennonite Church, I want to give you this gift. It was painted by my Aunt Velera Adams, and it is my hope that it serve as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world and He calls us also to be light.

I humbly thank all of you for coming to this service. You have blessed me with your support and your presence. I invite you all to stay and join us for a fellowship meal following the benediction. "Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"

Please stand and join in singing Hymn #580 My Life Flows On.