

Dear fellow redeemed by the blood of God's own Son,

When the great comedian, Steve Martin, started his career he had a very funny routine in which he would say, "Let's get small!" His audiences would break out in laughter as he contorted his body to make himself "small"!

Seriously, man really is "small;" and it is essential to our salvation that we know how small we are. The Psalmist compares God's greatness and glory to man's smallness in these words from Psalm 8: "*When I consider your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, WHAT IS MAN that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?*"

Creation was God's idea alone – a "power-work" of God's almighty Word! So also, the work of saving sinful mankind after his fall into sin, is God's "power-work" alone! Who was with God in eternity when He planned to show grace and mercy toward sinful mankind? – NO ONE!

When God planted His holy Seed in the Virgin Mary, did He ask Joseph's permission – NO! When God's Son loved the world enough to die for it, whose permission did He ask? – NO ONE'S!

If Jesus had asked His closest disciples whether He should go to Jerusalem to die on the cross and rise again the third day, they would have said, "No! This is suicide! This is foolishness! Already at our Lord's *Transfiguration*, Peter, James, and John wanted Jesus to stay in the glory of that Mountain moment, rather than go down to Jerusalem to DIE! Jesus knew of sin's corruption also in His band of small-minded followers. Man is still too small to redeem himself or his brother from sin. So, we gather here today and rejoice because

OUR *GOD* IS AT WORK TO SAVE!

I.

God alone saves *through faith alone*, and this faith comes by the hearing of God's word, as Paul says in Romans 10:17. But "*how shall they hear without a preacher?*" Paul asks. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: '*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!*'" (Rm. 10:14-15)

So it is that Our God *alone* is at work to save *Through His "fellow-workers."* He might have sent His holy angels to proclaim His Word until Judgment Day. Instead, He chose to send small and sinful men to deliver the message to their fellow sinners. In His perfect wisdom, our God wanted His *fellow-workers* to comfort other sinners with the same Gospel by which they themselves are comforted. (See *2Corinthians 1:3-4*)

So it is that our God has provided you with pastors through the years. In spite

of great weakness, they have faithfully proclaimed the Gospel of peace among you, that you may be saved eternally. How faithfully and tirelessly you have been served by some within your own midst, who have also preached the Gospel as called *fellow-workers*. We also give thanks to our God for their labors among you!

Now your God has brought you to the end of a long vacancy. So, let's talk about your new pastor's "feet"! Paul says that his feet are "beautiful" because they "preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!" Although your new preacher freely admits that he was happy to escape the "snowy north," his feet carried him swiftly to you with the Good News he has heard and desires to proclaim to you!

Your vacancy pastor has feet too, but your new pastor's feet are younger and more nimble! Our feet are different, yet they carry the same message of peace to comfort, strengthen, and gladden your hearts!

For this reason Paul asks the Corinthians before our text: "*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (servants) through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*" (1Cor. 3:5) Paul and Apollos were fellow-workers with God for the salvation of the Corinthians. So just as the Christians in Corinth were NOT "of Apollos" or "of Paul," neither are you "of John," "of Sam," or "of Vance." Nor will you be "of Rob."

Paul writes in the verse before our text that "he who plants and he who waters are one." We have been enabled and called to serve you "as one" – together as God's "fellow-workers." We are all little men, "ministers" or "servants" of God. But "*you are Christ's and Christ is God's*" (1Cor.3:23), and our God is at work to save YOU!

II.

This is because YOU, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, are very special: "*you are God's field, God's building.*" Notice: Paul does *not* say, "*You are OUR field.*" Paul and Apollos knew that the Corinthians were God's field, not theirs. Even though they had labored in that field, *neither the tools, nor the seed nor the field belonged to them, but to God alone!* As you know, dear brother, "*faith comes by hearing*" the *Word of the Holy Spirit*" (Rom. 10:17), and in no other way.

Therefore, Paul also exhorted pastor Timothy: "*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*"(1Tim. 4:16) And again, Paul, wrote: "*Preach the Word! Be ready when it is convenient and when it is not. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all patience and teaching.*"(2Tim. 4:2)

All these commands of the Apostle Paul, which were laid upon the heart of Timothy, will also lay heavily on your own heart, dear brother. As in your previous congregations, you will spend thousands of hours every year, praying, studying, preaching, convincing, correcting, encouraging and teaching "with all patience."

But now dear brothers and sisters of Immanuel, ask yourselves *why God places such a heavy burden upon your pastor.* Because, through him your God is at work to save YOU, by cultivating HIS field, and constructing HIS building.

Like the congregation in the city of Corinth, YOU are God's "FIELD." The word "field" in our text is a translation of the Greek word, "GEOORGION," which means "to work the land." To "work the land" does not refer to "set-aside" land, "wet-lands" or fields that are not cultivated, but to lands and fields that need to be worked – tilled, cultivated, and watered.

The English name that comes from the Greek 'GEOORGION' is ? – George! While growing up in the farmlands of the upper Midwest, I knew many farmers by the name of "GEORGE." They were "workers of the land or field." In the CLC there is only one pastor whose first name is George. He came from a long line of farmers who worked the fields of South Dakota. But you called Rob Sauers to be your pastor. God has made him your "George" to do the work in Immanuel's field!

Now look at the next term, "building" or "house." You may not have many "farmers" in this congregation. But Paul moves from agriculture to architecture, in order to relate his message to all of us. In this verse, the Greek word translated "building" has the meaning of a "building *still under construction*," NOT a *finished building*.

The Corinthians had received many spiritual gifts from God. Although they were still "babes" in many ways, some thought of themselves as a building of God that was complete and finished! But in order to save them, Paul writes, "*You are God's field under cultivation, a building under construction.*"

God's fellow-workers never feel that there is nothing left for them to do in God's field, God's building. Why? Because a Christian's growth is never complete in this life! Your pastor knows that he must cultivate and build your faith and its fruits unto salvation. Through the proper use of the Law and Gospel in Word and Sacrament he is ready to "convince" you of the truth of salvation, and "rebuke," you when you fall into sin and error. He is prepared to help you *grow* in the knowledge of Your Savior and be preserved in the faith of Christ unto eternal life! In a few moments, we shall hear your new pastor's promise to do all this because you are God's field and God's building.

But you will also promise before God to receive him as the shepherd-servant sent by our Lord Himself! This means that you will permit your pastor to teach, correct, comfort, and encourage you under the cross of Jesus. When he must use the Law of God to tear up the hard ground of your human hearts, so that you may once again receive the life-giving water of the Gospel, you will not despise him, but love him more!

You will come to receive God's Word in the Worship services and Bible Classes, as from the Lord Himself. You will pray for your pastor and regard him highly because

your loving Savior has chosen him for you!

Finally, as pastor and congregation, you know how blessed you are here at Immanuel. Like Peter, James, and John, you will also follow your Savior down the mountain of His Transfiguration to share His "Good News" of salvation with others. There are many in the area who are not being cultivated, watered, and constructed unto salvation. Don't you wish they might have what you have?

I have read of a place in Norway called "*Gudvangen*," which means "*God's Garden or Field*." It is a little patch of life and fertility, surrounded by huge rocks. Think of your church as a little field of fertile ground in the midst of the spiritual darkness and desolation all around you!

May God help you all to go out as pastor and congregation with renewed zeal to break up the rocky ground around you, plant the seed of God's Word and water it! For surely, you chose the name "*Immanuel*," because GOD is at work to save, and He is "*WITH YOU!*" AMEN!

