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## Light from Above, Laser Our Hearts

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*President Meyer preached the following sermon for the opening service of the 175th academic year.*

It is a great time to be in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ! To our seminarians, I hope this year will fuel your passion for service to the congregations and communities to which you will be called. To faculty and staff, let us demonstrate our calling by putting a premium on our personal interactions with our students. Oh, I know there are people in our churches who furrow their brows and wring their hands. It's a bad time; the church no longer has a privileged place in our culture. It's a bad time; mainline denominations are losing members, ours among them. It's a bad time; the economy is slow and there's not enough money for the work of the church. With so much bad news, what kind of dummy would go to a seminary? I'll tell you who, someone who knows that our sufficiency does not come from the external things but "from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:5). Hardships are not to be denied and the challenges can be overwhelming, but the truth is these are times of unprecedented opportunity and right now is a great time to be in seminary and ministry. It's all because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Savior is the game changer when it comes to zeal for seminary and ministry. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:5-6). The more he shines in your hearts, the more your life and ministry will radiate a good spirit and joyous confidence of the Christian faith. That's what the people of the church want from their pastors and deaconesses and leaders. That's what so many people want to see from the church. To that end we pray, Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, laser the light from above into our hearts for ministry.

The greatest focus of seminary and ministry, indeed of all Christian living is to be upon God. Through the books, through the classes, through service projects, through conversations, through family, through intramurals and intercollegiate sports, through it all, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Dt 6:5). God focused. Theocentric. "In the beginning God... And God said, 'Let there be light and there was light'" (Gn 1:1, 3). The Word of God accomplishes that which it says. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6). I know that you will have your studies, your work, perhaps family. I know you have time pressures and bills to pay. Put them aside for a time every day and walk through the campus. When you have more time, walk or run or bike through Forest Park. Look up and remember "God, who said, 'Let line shine out of darkness.'" How will you lead souls to heaven if you will not learn to look up at the cathedral of creation? Light from above, laser our hearts. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness...'"

The text moves from the First Article to the Second and Third from the cathedral of creation to your inmost being. Notice the past tense, "has shone in our hearts." That happened when the word came out of the heavens to work saving faith in you. God the evange-

list. Word, water, rebirth, resurrection The devil will tempt you to think that it is all past tense. When externals are depressing you, the devil will twist the word. “You were baptized. So what now?” The truth is, in the midst of all the pressures you feel, you are baptized. When you are absorbed in the intricacies of academic theology at seminary, the devil will tempt you to believe that the Scriptures are only a relic. The truth is, “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). And when you feel alone, alone with your fears and anxieties, your doubts and little faith, your guilt about not being able to get it all done...the truth is “I am with you always.” David said something to his son Solomon about the building of the temple. I think it can be applied to us as we begin this new year. “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished” (1 Chr 28:20). So the significance of your baptism continues. “Arise, shine for your light has come” (Is 60:1). Light from above, laser our hearts!

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” What is the glory of God? The great God made the cosmos; he is sovereign. The great God sits enthroned above the turmoil of this world; he is sovereign. The great God will execute judgment over all; he is sovereign. That’s all true but the glory of God is that God has come down to bring salvation to you. The glory of God is that God has come down to bring salvation to me. In John chapter 12 Jesus prayed, “Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (Jn 12:28, 30–33). An old line from African-American preaching says, “God sits high but looks low.” God-centered; Christ-centered. Theocentric; Christocentric. The justification of the sinner by grace through faith. Jesus Christ is the glory of God to us. Light from above, laser our hearts!

I’m told this is a true story. An elderly man was dying. Fortunately his children were able to come to his death bed. One child came in and the elderly man said, “Son, daughter,” whichever it was, “your mother and I are so proud of you. You’ve done well in life, have a fine family but most important of all you have not left your Lord or your church. When you were little and it was bedtime, we used to say, ‘Good night,’ not ‘Good bye’ because we knew we’d see each other in the morning. And now I say, ‘Good night’ because we will see each other again.” A second child came in. The same conversation: “You have done well but most important of all you have not left your Lord or your church. ‘Good night,’ not ‘Good bye.’” Finally a third child came in. “Your mother and I are so proud of you. You’ve done well in life, have a fine family but we are so grieved that you have left your Lord and your church. And now I have to say, ‘Good bye’ because we will not see one another again.” And as the story was told to me, that night he died. Many in the church would say, “How sad, how terribly sad about that child.” No, no, no! The passion of Concordia Seminary is, “Let’s go out and find that child.” Let your passion be to go out in your generation and find all those children. What a great time to get into ministry! Light from above, laser our hearts! Amen.

Dale A. Meyer  
President