**Module 3: The Community Pastor**

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

**Devotion**

It’s easy for pastors to feel that their success hinges upon their charm, charisma, or ability to care. Naturally, no one wants an insensitive or rude person in ministry! But our confessional heritage has a much different approach to ministry than our culture’s tendency to overvalue charm, charisma, or care. Phillipp Melanchthon located the nature of ministry in the word’s efficacy to grant faith: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel” (*Augsburg Confession* V). Ultimately, ministry deals with preaching—as 2 Timothy above puts it—and that means delivering the goods of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

We shouldn’t hear this as esoteric jargon. It’s about freedom. I can be quite free to do ministry when ministry isn’t all about me. As a pastor, I am a servant of the word, not of my own ego, and so I can quite courageously speak the word whether it be a message that uproots or plants (Jeremiah 1:10). Otherwise, when captive to my own charisma, charm, or ability to provide care, I’m bound to uphold only the ideal of “do no harm.” Let’s be honest: it can be just as oppressive to be nice as it is to be mean, if that niceness entails diluting God’s word. After all, pastors are accountable to law and gospel, words which bind or free, kill the old Adam and Eve or restore life to the dead. And, when it comes right down to it, laity want truth and to encounter God’s word from the pastor.

Some people are uncomfortable with a pastor’s authority, and, unfortunately, that includes even some pastors. Early in my ministry I was grateful for a retiree who pointblank said, “Pastor, you are our teacher.” He was comfortable with my spiritual authority and he validated that authority for me, allowing me to affirm it in turn. Serving the community, we will encounter many who appreciate pastoral authority and, of course, others who don’t. But our ability to minister isn’t grounded in our personality, no matter how winsome or schmooze-able it may be, but instead is grounded in God’s creative word. In this way, the responsibility for ministry is taken off our shoulders and placed in divine hands, right where God desires it.

**Prayer**

*Author of all life, I thank you that because of Jesus’ life-giving descent to a sinful world that you elevate me to share in your creative activity. Help me ever to be a good listener to my people and to have the courage to share your word with them. In Jesus, Amen.*