Ordination of Nadia Stefko to the Sacred Order of Priests Proverbs 3:1-7

St. John’s Episcopal Church Psalm 119:89-96

Jacqueline Clark Romans 6:3-11

April 9, 2016 Matthew 5:1-12

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God, my strength and my redeemer. May your word only be spoken; may your word only heard. Amen.

Feeding and hungering. Those are the words that come to mind for me as we celebrate Nadia’s ordination today.

Let’s start with feeding. While Nadia and I were graduate students, we were part of a mutual discernment group led by the wonderful Stacy Alan. As Nadia wrestled with whether she might be called to the priesthood, she talked about gathering people around a table and breaking bread. Quite literally tearing apart warm, fresh, fragrant bread so that it might be shared.

This image captures something of who Nadia is. She feeds people. She delights in growing and preparing good food with great care-- care for the earth, for the people who work its fields, and for the people who will consume it. She delights in gathering people and serving them, feeding their bodies with food and their souls with pleasure and fellowship.

This image also captures something of who Nadia will be. Of what God is consecrating in her as a gift to the church.

Ordinations are all about God’s love for us. The orders of ministry, as the prayer book says, a gift from God for the nurture of God’s people. In the priesthood, God sets apart people whose actual job is to love us, and to show us God’s love for us. People who are charged with “nourish[ing] Christ’s people from the riches of his grace.” And God also provides the imperfect people he calls as priests with particular ways of manifesting that love. One of these ways, one of God’s old favorites, is feeding. Food is love incarnate, one of the ways people make our love tangible. Think of the parent who offers her baby the bottle or the breast, or prepares his grown child a favorite dish. The spouse who makes pancakes on Sunday morning. The friend who invites you over to share a meal. God embodies love by feeding us with the fruit of the earth, and in a very particular way at God’s table.

Today, Nadia, the Holy Spirit will transfigure your feeding ministry. The bread you break will not be just a gift from God and the hands that made it, but Love incarnate, God’s very self. The people with whom you share it will become not just a community, but the body of Christ. And for that moment, you will dwell not just in the sanctuary, or the living room, but in the Kingdom of God, drawing each reality towards the other.

Which brings us to hungering. Our Gospel for today is the Beatitudes. They’re the very first words of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s Gospel, giving them added significance. They pronounce the blessedness of those who don’t matter by the standards of the world. Those who are poor, materially or spiritually. Those who have suffered losses. Those who bear the brunt of our world’s brokenness. Those without power. In other words, they are a vision for a Kingdom of God. But they’re not just a vision-- not just promises to be cashed in during God’s “Great Clean Up of the World,” as one writer puts it. They are a road map for living into that Kingdom now. A charge to incarnate it in our daily life.

And in fact, the people Jesus declared blessed are not just those that the world writes off. They are also those who hunger and thirst for the Kingdom, and whose hunger draws them to make it a present reality. The blessed are those who reject retribution. Those who seek not just the absence of violence, but the presence of wholeness. Those whose Kingdom living cost them pride, power, resources, or comfort, but for whom it is worth any price.

The Eucharist does not just feed us. It is also formation for the Kingdom of God. It offers us a taste of that Kingdom.At God’s table, as Nadia once wrote, “there is a place-- and enough food-- for everyone.” This taste helps us to see that our truest, deepest hunger is for God and God’s Kingdom. For that new order where every person has enough. Where each immigrant and refugee is welcomed to a safe, sustaining place. Where there is peace in our streets and among nations. The Eucharist is, to paraphrase Gordon Lathrop, a feast that stokes our hungry. And that holy hunger draws us into the Kingdom of God right now.

We gather today to witness that despite all the evidence to the contrary, despite the suffering and despair and horror around us, the Spirit is working in our midst. She has drawn Nadia towards this day. She has recruited people to her cause: family, friends, members of Grace and St. John’s and now Christ Church, who have supported and formed Nadia. And now She raises up Nadia as a priest for us. We have the privilege of witnessing this ministry, renewing our faith and hope that those who hunger will be filled. That “things which were being cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new.” And that not just Nadia, but all of us gathered and in fact all of creation “are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Ordinations are all about God’s love for us. That love means not only that God feeds us, but that God is transforming our world so that all are fed. So Nadia, God has called you as a priest to love the people with whom you serve. And God has called you as a priest to love the whole of God’s creation, so as you break open the bread and the Word, you might sharpen and deepen the hunger of your community. Then they, united into one nourished and hungry body, may be bread broken for world. And for that, we celebrate. Amen.