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Joseph Wesley Mathews
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Sermon at the Ordination and Installation of Donald Ray Steinle
First Congregational Church, Passaic, New Jersey

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This coming to be which comes to be in this dramatic exercise--I mean what's happening to Mr. Steinle, that is, how he becomes the Reverend Mr. Donald R. Steinle--could not happen at a more important moment in the history of the church. Hark ye well, for now I prophesy: Within the next 40 years, you are going to understand that this is the church's finest hour. Those who have eyes to see, behold the coming glory, like a cloud the size of a man's hand on you distant horizon. For the sign is there. What an hour to become a cleric! And what an hour to be installed as a shepherd in a local church! And I want to talk--and mark you, I'm a hardened old revolutionary in the church--and I want to share with you what I see happening now. And you mark well, Mr. Steinle. But before I begin, I want to read a bit of scripture. And Mr. Steinle, as the church, for you understand, I am the church, I exhort you and I command you to read this to the end of your days on every November 22nd.

It's in the fourth chapter of Luke: 'Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the holy spirit. And he was led by that spirit to spend 40 days in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. And when the devil had exhausted every kind of temptation, he withdrew, until the next opportunity.' [Oh, you think it doesn't say that there. That's because it's been a long time since you really read the Bible.] 'And now, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of that Holy Spirit. The news of him spread throughout all the surrounding district, and he taught in their synagogues to everyone's great admiration. And finally he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And according to his custom he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. And there he stood up to read the Scriptures. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book and he found the place where these words are written: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor and hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind and to set at liberty them that are bruised, yes, to proclaim the accepted year of the Lord.' And then he shut the book, handed it back to the attendant, and resumed his seat. And every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. And then he began to tell them: 'This very day this scripture has been fulfilled while you were listening to it.' And when they heard this, everybody in the synagogue was furiously angry. And they sprang to their feet and drove him right out of the town, taking him to the brow of the hill on which it was built and intended to hurl him down bodily. But he walked straight through the crowd and went on his way.'

Now what do you think of that? Don't you think that Steinle had better read that?

I said I was going to speak, but that's not quite right. Anymore, I don't know how to speak. I've lost the prowess of speaking. So, these days I just meander. Now I have a friend who insists that that's a terrible word. And when I pressed her as to why she didn't like that word, it's because meandering to her wasn't doing anything. And she's right. And she said it wasn't intentional enough.

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agency in the church. No. The renewing forces were present 300 years before the Protestant Reformation and Luther did not have a single original insight. He simply drew together what the--oh, shall I mention Waldo in Italy? Shall I mention Huss in Czechoslovakia? Shall I mention Wycliff? Shall I mention the Illuminati? Hundreds of renewal movements had penetrated into the life of the church, I say for 300 years. And then Luther represented the wedding of the renewing dimension of the church and the establishment. And what always happens out of the wedding is that the church finds a brand new form through which God's people are present in history.

One of the sort of amusing things, if you have a sense of humor and you are a part of the movemental church, is that the movemental church never builds the forms, the new forms of the church--oh, there's new wine abroad today, I want to talk about that. And you can jolly well bet there's going to be new wineskins. And yet it's not the renewal dimension of the church, it's the wedding of the establishment and the renewing forces that brings the new external manifestation of the church you are going to see--yes, if you have eyes to behold, you can see some of them on the horizon already. That's what I mean by the wedding. The established church is now...you know, 16, 18 years ago...As a matter of fact, someone introduced me to a council of bishops in the Methodist Church two or three years ago and the way he introduced me I found very flattering, I could have listened to it twice. I could have. He said, "This young man"--he was talking about me--"This young man some seventeen or eighteen years ago was saying things that disturbed the establishment greatly." And he said, "Now the establishment has taken over saying those things themselves." He was trying really to say that I was pretty useless now because...but you see, this is the glory of the establishment. It's ready to move. It's ready to move. Now where you have to have a sense of humor is that actually after the wedding the movemental church discovers what it didn't want to know all along, it's nothing. And only the established, only mother church, marches on.

Now, there's a twist in this however for the establishment, too. I'm a lowly Methodist. And I'm a clergyman. And mother Methodism bore me. And I mean just crummy old mother Methodism. Well, if you don't think that mother Methodism is crummy, you come on and join us for a while. And you see, the irony of this, I have no patience with church people who do not love the church. No patience. But the church I mean is the actual church--the warped, twisted, sick, perverted, crummy historical church as it is. That's the only church there is to love. If you love some daydream that you have--if you are going to love me, you're just going to love me, this sort of fleshy, flabby 59 year old man with sort of a Neanderthal profile. If you're going to love me--you're going to love this. And so with the church. I'd like to take a lot of clergymen I know and just sort of bounce them on their heads til they understand what I got through saying. Mother Methodism, twisted, warped, she bore me, I mean, she freighted that Word to me without which there isn't any life, and that is that God loves me. Period. Just period. I get awful sick of these people going around getting sensitivity and looking for acceptance. Well, it's been so long since...yes, well that's another course.

Mother Methodism bore me. And she nurtured me. And most of my adult years have been spent with my fist in the face of mother Methodism, but she never dropped me. Never dropped me. I cannot understand clergymen leaving the church. I just

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the post-modern world. And the way you are going to see this manifest is that local congregations like this are going to dare to use themselves as guinea pigs to experiment on behalf of the total church with new forms and structures of God's people in our day. And when that happens, you'll have an illustration of what I mean by thinking tactically. And now I'm through, except to say, Mr. Steinle, what a day, what a day to be ordained a cleric, Mr. Steinle, and what a day to be installed as a shepherd in a local church.

And now I've got a prayer, a very old one out of the church. Very old. You won't even believe it: "Almighty and everlasting God." [Any prayer that's a good one spends most of its time getting clear on to whom it's addressed.] "Almighty and everlasting God, who by thy holy spirit didst preside in the councils of the blessed apostles and hast promised through thy son Jesus Christ to be with thy church to the end of the world, we beseech thee to be with the council gathered now and here in thy name and presence. Save us from all error, ignorance, pride and prejudice. And of thy mercy, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to direct, sanctify and govern us in our work by the mighty power of the holy ghost that the comfortable gospel of Christ may be truly preached, truly received, truly followed in all places to the breaking down of the kingdom of sin, Satan and death, til at length the whole of thy dispersed sheep, being gathered into one fold, shall become partakers of eternal life, through the merit and death of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen."