

God's grace is yours through Jesus. Amen.

What's a Vicar? That's a strange word. Maybe you think it's a strange coincidence that every one of these guys is named Victor. No. Actually, vicar comes from a word that means in place of. A Vicar is someone who stands in place of the pastor. Vicar is someone who does what pastor does: preaches sermons, teaches Bible class, visits people who are sick or in need. A Vicar is a student pastor, like an intern. He has studied God's Word for four years in college and two more years at the Seminary, which is like graduate school for pastors. There are three purposes for the vicar program. The Vicar program builds up Jesus' kingdom by allowing men to receive practical experience in a congregation. The Vicar program builds up God's people as Vicar preaches, teaches and reaches out and as people see Vicar grow through the year. The Vicar program helps Vicar gain confidence in being a pastor and joy in serving God and God's people. Ok. Enough with the boring facts. But do you see the JOY idea, in those purposes? Jesus is first, for Vicar and for our congregation. Others are second. Yourself is last. Really, when we look at it, the Vicar is a lot like Jesus was in our reading. The Vicar is a preacher of God's Word, a shepherd of God's people and an answer to prayer. I'll repeat those. Vicar is a preacher of God's Word, a shepherd of God's people and an answer to prayer.

Look at what Jesus did. He went through all the towns and villages. Jesus didn't sit still. Jesus didn't wait for people to come to him. Jesus went to them. Vicar, this verb is an imperfect. This was Jesus' continual action. He was constantly going through new towns, constantly finding new villages, more places where he could teach, preach and heal.

Vicar, that's a lot like you. I have a little piece of paper on my desk that reminds me what God has called me to do. Three words: preach, teach, reach. Sound like what Jesus did? Well, except for that last one. I'm preaching and teaching and reaching. Jesus was preaching and teaching and healing every disease and sickness. I can't heal people. Or can you, Vicar? Every Sunday these people, including myself, are going to come here and stand before you with a dreadful, mortal disease. Sin. Maybe a husband and wife will come, still a little angry with each other after last night's argument. Maybe a mom will come racked with guilt at losing her temper with her children. And we will come with our dreadful illness and we will say, "Vicar, I am a poor, miserable sinner! Heal me!" And you will say, right over there, "God our heavenly Father has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins!" You will heal us! Maybe a young man will come racked with guilt over what he saw on his computer screen or what he actually did on his date. And you will place Jesus' healing body and blood in his hands, his lips, his heart and say, "Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace!" You will hold a healing power greater than one for the body. You will hold healing for the soul.

And so, members and friends of Resurrection, remember that Vicar is a preacher of God's Word. God's Word are in his mouth. God has called him to preach and teach and reach. I know at first when vicar preaches he's still getting his feet wet and maybe it you'll notice a lack of experience. But he's still bringing God's Word. And maybe you will be tempted to think. "Vicar came to visit me. I must not be important enough for pastor." Remember. It's the same Word of God. It's the same healing power. Vicar is a preacher of God's Word.

Vicar is a shepherd of God's people. Look at Jesus. He had compassion on people. We don't have an English word or even sentence to convey the idea of compassion. It talks about the innermost, deepest down feeling you can have. It means be sick to your stomach, be tied up in knots, be heart wrenched and gut wrenched. Vicar, you need to feel the way Jesus felt. You need to mourn when a dear family member dies as though this were someone of your own family. Because now they are part of your family. You need to laugh with God's people and celebrate their new additions, their marriages. Hang out with them like family. They are now. And yes, it's ok to have a beer with them at these times. You can't be a distant professional, just doing your job. You need to be heart wrenched and gut wrenched and sick to your stomach and happy to the heavens.

Because these people need that. We need that. We are harassed and helpless. Again, these bare words can't expose the true picture. Think of sheep who have been attacked by wolves, stripped of their wool, bitten, bleeding, dying, laying exposed for the hyenas to finish the job. That's who we are, man. We need a shepherd to bind our wounds and tell us, "If God is for us, who can be against us!" We need someone to beat away the wolves by teaching us the truth! We need someone to point out the popular ideas that sound so good, tolerance and acceptance which can easily be wolves covered in the wool they stole from the sheep. We need someone to point out false teaching. We need someone to lead us to the good pastures of God's Word. If you are going to lead us to the Word, you need to put yourself in the Word. I know we've already read the New Testament together. Let's keep going. One of the happiest moments I had was seeing one of the vicars with whom I served reading his Bible in the morning, still holding on to the same old schedule I had given him and saying, "Thanks, Pastor. I'm going to keep on reading. That was the best thing you taught me." Vicar, you are a shepherd to harassed and helpless sheep.

What's left? Vicar is a preacher of God's Word, a shepherd of God's people and an answer to prayer. Maybe you saw that in the service folder and thought, "What?" Vicar you might be thinking, wait? I'm not the answer to prayer. I'm the pray-er. I'm the one who needs answers to prayer. I am not the answer to prayer. I'm a part of God's problem. I'm not the solution. Look at Jesus' words and think of yourself differently. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore to send out workers into his harvest field. Wow! You are an answer to prayer.

The harvest is so plentiful. Man, there are so many souls who need to hear about Jesus. 17% of people in America attend a Christian church each week. That means 83% don't. Our community of Verona has 10,000 people, so each week 8 thousand, three hundred people are not listening to the shepherd's voice. And our community is one of the fastest growing in the state, more and more souls are coming to us. And that's not even counting Belleville and Monroe and Monticello... , the harvest is so plentiful. Almost every week we see someone new here for the first time! God be praised!

The harvest is so plentiful. Let's for a moment not think in terms of thousands. Let's think in terms of ones. Where's your harvest field? What neighbor's car was still in the driveway, and he's wondering, "Why do they always get up on the one day you sleep in?" Who's the coworker who can't help but notice, "There's just something about you. It's not just the words you don't say. It's the words you do say. What is it?" There's nothing like your own personal harvest. There's nothing like your own garden. I really like cucumbers, but I still have trouble eating the ones from the store, because I grew up eating them straight out of the garden. It's nice to hear about the harvest others are bringing in, but there's nothing like seeing the harvest of one, that God used you to bring in. Who wants to harvest? Who's with us? Who wants to work this great harvest field?

We need more workers. The workers are few. And from the way it looks, the workers are getting fewer. In the next ten years, the average number of pastors in our church body who will reach retirement age is over 40. Forty a year retiring. The average number of pastors graduating the Seminary every year? Around 30. Or less. Do some quick math and ten in one year isn't so bad, but 100 in ten years? 100 fewer pastors? Who will continue to work the harvest fields of Verona and Monroe and Mt. Horeb? Who will continue to work the harvest of billions in China and India? Who will the workers be? Maybe your son. Maybe even you. How cool would it be to see your son standing in this pulpit, preaching God's Word? My parents traveled all over the state the first ten times I preached because they couldn't believe it was actually happening. How awesome would it be for you, young man, to one day be standing in Vicar's place, to one day be the first one someone calls when they need healing, not for their body, but for their soul? I get to sit in hospital rooms where only family and pastor are allowed. I get invited to events where only family and pastor got invited. Yeah, that's an answer to prayer. Yeah, Vicar is an answer to prayer.

Do you remember our first Vicar here? Maybe you thought we just got lucky and got a good one. Then the second one was just as good and well, maybe lightning can strike twice. Now at three and four and five and six and seven and you realize, "God is answering our prayers. God is sending workers into his field. We get to be just a piece of the process. We get to be God's tools in helping these men be pastors one day. God has answered our prayers." Vicar, you are an answer to prayer. You really are, an answer to prayer. Amen.