Lutheran theology is rich with paradox. We are both saint and sinner. The word of God is both the word of judgment and promise. Jesus is both human and divine. God’s kingdom is already here and not yet here. The paradox that describes God’s kingdom—already/not yet—describes well the ordination of women.

The ELCA and her predecessor bodies have been ordaining white women for 50 years. Women of Color for 40. 10 years of LGBTQIA+ individuals being able to serve freely. All people being invited to share in the work of God in the world is evidence of God’s Kingdom, God’s future, God’s dream being realized. One of the most affirming messages I’ve personally experienced came from a retired Presbyterian minister who confessed it had been a life-long hope of his to have a female Pastor. This is the “already” portion of the already/not yet paradox.

While the gate of ordination has been opened, ordination does not promise equal compensation, leadership opportunities, or a church free of sexism. I have personally experienced inappropriate comments on my attire, being disrespectfully addressed, and unwanted physical contact—while I was serving as a Pastor. My personal experiences are few in number, though that they happen at all is evidence we are “not yet” at the place where women are free from sexual objectification.

I also have personal experiences through ecumenical relationships. I have witnessed the deep pain and frustration experienced by women in other faith communities who are still denied ordained ministry. I have female Roman Catholic friends who chose lines of work other than ministry because of limited opportunities for leadership for women. Another Roman Catholic friend expressed her yearning for that day when “her daughters are as valued by the church as her sons.” A friend in a local Evangelical church asked me to explain “how we [the church] did it [got to the place of allowing for the ordination of women]”. Another female friend in the Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar is also waiting for that day when women can be ordained. The ELCA can celebrate 50, 40 and 10 years of ordination, yet our joy is not complete with the knowledge that sisters in Christ are unable to answer God’s call.

We will continue to live in this paradox of God’s Kingdom already here and not yet here. As we march on to anniversaries to come, I pray we continue to honor one another as partners in the Gospel. I pray we continue to cling to Christ who binds us together. I pray all persons are treated with dignity and given opportunities to do God’s Work in Montana and beyond.

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