

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – December 22, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, heirs of the Lutheran Reformation,

When a friend or loved one is injured or seriously ill, we turn to prayer, offering up desperate prayers for health and healing. While we are praying, we are dialing 9-1-1. We depend on paramedics, doctors and nurses to help and save our ill or injured love one, and it is right that we should turn to them for help.

We know that God hears our prayers and that he is working through the first responders and medical personnel. We know, too, that God can intervene in astonishing and unexpected ways and he may, according to his will, do exactly that. When he does, we offer songs and prayers of praise for his mercy. But even through the eyes and hands of those medical personnel, God is present and working in miraculous ways. He is, as it were, “hiding” behind such people, working through their skills to help and heal.

We say that these rescue and medical workers have a “calling” in life. This is their vocation in life, to help and heal and save. It is what they—Christian and non-Christian alike—feel called to do. They are not alone in having a calling, a vocation. You have a calling, a vocation, too. In fact, you have many of them and those callings may change over time. You may immediately think of your career, whatever that may be—construction worker, teacher, IT tech, housewife, administrative assistant, office manager and any other work at which you are employed. It is true that such work is a vocation, a calling. But you have other callings too.

Those other callings or vocations involve every relationship that you have. You may be a father, mother, husband, wife, parent, son, daughter, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, student, teacher, employee, or employer—the list goes on. You are very likely many of these things. You wear a lot of hats! And if you are like me you may find it a bit of challenge at times to know which hat is the most important to wear. That’s why it’s important to consider our calling as Christians.

You do have one “hat” that is the foundation for all the others. You wear a crown, visible only to eyes of faith, as a son or daughter of the King of kings. This crown of glory and life is yours as a baptized child of God, who has called you into the kingdom of his Son and has summoned you into a life of love and service to others. You are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to love God with all of your heart and soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is your chief calling, your most important vocation—named from the Latin word *vocare*, which means to call. Within that chief calling as a baptized child of God, you live out your many other vocations.

Your vocations in some cases will remain the same; others may change. You may be a husband or wife, and later become a father or mother as well. You may be a child of your parents, and in time become a brother or sister too. You may be a teacher and at the same time attend school as a student yourself. In all of these constant and changing roles, you live as a son or daughter of

the King and share his love in the world. In every place and relationship where your life as a citizen of heaven touches or intersects your life as a citizen in this world—at each of those places—whenever and wherever those dual citizenships intersect, that is where you exercise your calling as a child and servant of the Lord.

Martin Luther, whose work we celebrate this month, had many vocations too, callings that changed his life and ours as well. He was a son of Hans and Margaret Luther and a baptized child of God. He was an obedient son, who first set out to study law, a calling that pleased his father. Later, fearing for his eternal salvation, Martin determined that a different calling was needed and he became an Augustinian monk. Believing himself called to be a monk, he hoped by his work and study and prayer to find a merciful God who would forgive his sins.

While living in the monastery, Martin was sent to the study the Bible so that he would be able to lecture at the university. In time he became a doctor of biblical studies—a calling of life-long importance for him as a teacher of the church and a professor at the university. Later Luther would marry and take on the callings of husband to Katie and father to their children. One of his most important callings was that of pastor, as he proclaimed in simple, caring language the good news of God's free forgiveness in Jesus Christ, bringing comfort and hope to the people he served. Martin Luther's callings would carry him into areas of love of service and into conflict and suffering, the same places that our callings may carry us.

Our callings are the places where our heavenly citizenship and our earthly citizenship intersect. As at any regular intersection—if viewed from above—a cross is formed. That intersection of heaven and earth, that cross of suffering, marks the vocation of our Lord Jesus, who was sent to take onto himself the burden of our sins. Jesus took onto himself the sin and guilt of our every failed calling, of our failure to love and serve our neighbor as ourselves, of our failure to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind. He took into his own body the sins we commit in our callings as husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter and all the rest. He carried that sin and guilt to the cross and there suffered in our place the penalty of death that we earned for ourselves. That was our Lord's calling, his vocation. He rose from the dead, never to die again, and that too is our calling, our present and future calling. Through Baptism we share in his death and resurrection, raised up now, today, to walk in newness of life. One day we will be raised up from our graves, as he was, to live in his presence forever.

For now, our calling as baptized children of God may follow the path of the cross. The cross-shaped intersection of our dual citizenships may bring suffering into our lives too, as we live as God's holy people on this earth. In our various vocations we may at times be called to take up the burdens of others, of our family members, friends or co-workers. Our calling as sons and daughters of the King of kings may mean that we must endure the suffering of persecution. At such times we pray that we will have the strength to remain steadfast in our faith and in our calling as baptized children of God.

In every vocation you have and will have, you are called to love God and to love your

neighbor as yourself. What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? What do you desire for yourself, for your own life—health, employment, peace and safety for your family, eternal salvation? That is what you desire for the neighbor—be it friend, family or stranger. You desire for your neighbor what you desire for yourself. That is your calling, your vocation, to glorify God who is at work in you, behind you, through you, caring for others and carrying out his astonishing works of love and service. The apostle Paul praises the God who has called us to himself in Christ and sends us out into the world in his service: “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

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