

This is Reformation Sunday where we celebrate being justified by grace through faith... God's love is not dependent on our behavior... And this gives us tremendous freedom. As Jesus says in our gospel reading, "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Freedom from an angry God who would judge us according to our sin.

I have memories of hearing the confession and forgiveness, and letting myself believe it.

By grace you have been saved... Your sins are forgiven! God doesn't love if you are good, God loves you because God is good, and God has promised to forgive all your sins. Good news indeed!

Now, this morning I'd like to do some reflecting on what that freedom looks like in our very real lives. It's all well and good to understand this stuff in our head, but what about the real world out there? How does justification by grace through faith connect Sunday with the rest of the week? What does justification by grace through faith look like-- where the rubber hits the road?

Integrating life and faith is always important. What we do in here, has to make a difference out there. And I'm talking not only for your life, but for the life of our community. We are Christians for the sake of the world...

In our Lutheran heritage we are theologians of the cross, which has led to a highly developed tradition of theology called vocation, or "vocatio". The word "vocation" actually comes from the Latin word "*vocare*" which means, "to call."

In other words, vocation is a really a spiritual question. Knowing that God calls and loves us into existence, the basic question then becomes “why?” Why did God put me in this particular place at this time? What is my purpose? What should I do with my life? What’s my life going to be about?

We typically think of these kinds of questions as job and career choices, or just making a living. But when you think about it, fundamentally, they are spiritual questions. God has called you into this world, to this place and time, now what are you going to do with the time God has given you? What are you called to do?

The theology of vocation can be very complicated, but in its basic form it’s a simple equation. If you have a neighbor, who has a need, you have a calling. And this is a sacred calling.

In other words, God has intentionally positioned you for a purpose. And when you respond to the neighbor’s need, you are literally doing God’s work with your hands. Luther was fond of saying, God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does.

This is how God works with us in our day to day lives. Everything you do to help a neighbor is a sacred call from God. I had a Seminary professor who used to say that God is interested in a lot more things than just theology. His way of telling seminary students, to get over themselves...

We often think that ministry is the work of the church, and it is. Ministry also happens in each of you in the jobs that you do.

Some of you are farmers—you're feeding the world. Some of you work in school-- passing on our knowledge and values. Some of you are in health care-- healing... Some of you are business people-- connecting others with products and services... Some of you are retired-- volunteering... Whatever it is that you do, you are in a sacred calling, and that makes a real difference for our world and for one another.

This theology of vocation extends far beyond our jobs, it also includes the roles that we play in our society. Raising children is a calling from God... Spending time with grand children is a calling from God... Being a husband, Being a wife... Serving on a board, is a calling from God... Being a member of the Lions club, is a calling from God... Being a coach... Being a 4-h leader...

In all the things that we do, in all the ways we participate in our community, we are doing God's work. And Luther said the neighbor is given to you. The neighbor might live across the street, the neighbor might live across town, the neighbor might even live across the country. If you imagine a person who has a need, you are called.

We experience this call to love our neighbor, in one of two ways. Sometimes we love to help our neighbor. Our neighbor might be a great person and we might love to spend time with him, or she might need help with a garden and we might love gardening. So sometimes, we get all excited about helping our neighbor. It's joyful and meaningful...

And we can also experience that call to love our neighbor as a cross. The neighbor might be a grumpy person, someone we don't like... Or, our neighbor might need

something we don't want to do. If you're my neighbor and you come to me and ask for some help painting, I'm just sayin, I hate painting, but if you remind me of this sermon, maybe I'll help. But I'll also let you know I'm bearing a cross to do it!

Quick story... After Kris and I were married we both worked two jobs. One of my jobs was with the Minneapolis Age and Opportunity Center. I worked on a chore crew and our primary focus was to do things for older adults so they could stay living in their own homes. We did a lot of odd jobs...

One summer we painted a house. It was Julia's house. She lived alone in a rough neighborhood in South Minneapolis.

Her house needed a lot of work! We not only needed to scrape it, we had to repair virtually every window. We also had to rebuild her porch because it was sagging and dangerous.

We must have spent a whole month on this one project. Every day we would go home with skinned knuckles, paint chips in our eyes, paint in our hair... We would be dirty and dog tired. But we stuck with it and got the job done.

Julia was always grateful, but on the last day we were there, she invited us into her house and sat us down; she had written a little thank-you that she wanted to read to us. And it was so beautiful... She wanted us to know how much it meant to her.

She talked about how her husband used to take care of everything, how the home had provided her family with shelter for so many years. She was moved to tears,

because she had lived in the house her whole married life... I'll always remember her gratitude.

One simple little thank you from the heart, made a whole month of hard work seem like it was worth it! We left that job feeling ten feet tall. It was very meaningful for us... And for years whenever I was close to that neighborhood, I would drive a little out of the way just to look at it. And wonder what ever happened to her...

In all the ways we experience being God's hands in this world, we find our lives to be deeply meaningful. In the things that get done... In the relationships that are developed... Our participation in this world gives us purpose, which ultimately feeds our soul.

Think about your life, all the different jobs you've done, all the different roles you've fulfilled, it's really remarkable isn't it? When we see our lives as doing God's work in the world, we are connecting Sunday with every day of the week.

And this is the good news today, you are justified by grace through faith, you are free to be the person God created you to be. You are God's hands in the world, you were created in the image of God. Your job is sacred, your work is sacred, your life is sacred...

This time of the year we celebrate the Harvest Festival. This morning at Cannon River and next week, at Cross of Christ. Imagine all the hard work in and through our two congregations this year. Now, imagine all the work that was accomplished in our community by all the members of both congregations. It's almost impossible to comprehend...

We are communities full of meaning and purpose; we have a lot to be thankful for!

Amen