

February 28, 2021

One of the gifts of Lutheran theology to the wider theological conversation is what we broadly call a theology of the cross. It's what Jesus calls us to do in our Gospel lesson. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." A theology of the cross is all about loving the neighbor, bearing a cross for our neighbor.

This theology of the cross is deeply embedded in Luther's writing. And it has been tremendously influential; in fact it is directly responsible for why the word "vocation" refers to one's job. You see the word "vocation" comes from the Latin word "vocare" which simply means calling. In a very real way, each and every one of us are called to the jobs that we do, and in God's eyes every honorable work is a sacred calling.

In our Lutheran identity, it's not only in our jobs where we fulfill our calling; it's also in the various roles that we occupy. For instance, as a parent, or grand-parent, as husband or wife, as member of the church, as a Sunday school teacher or greeter. Every time we reach out in love, we extend God's hand in service.

When we see the jobs and roles that we do as a sacred calling, then what we do with our time becomes a matter of spiritual significance... Acknowledging that God calls us into existence, the fundamental question then becomes "why?" Why did God put me here? What does God want me to accomplish? What is my purpose? It seems to me that these questions are fundamental to our faith journey, and I suspect we wrestle with these questions all the time.

A theology of the cross understands that we receive by giving away. In our gospel lesson, Jesus makes a simple statement of fact, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” This may seem like a contradiction-- how can we save our life by giving it away?

A quick story... When I look back over my life, there have been many different jobs or things that God has called me to do. Perhaps one of the most meaningful was when I worked at the Shepherd’s Center. It was perhaps one of the most meaningful jobs I’ve ever done.

Our motto was seniors serving seniors, serving the community. It was all about engaging the community with older adults as volunteers. And consequently, filling their lives with meaning and purpose.

There was Ray... He volunteered to help Older Adults with their taxes. He did over a hundred tax returns every year, and for many, many years. One day I asked him why he did it. He looked me straight in the eye and simply said, “It makes me feel good.” Indeed, Ray was just one of the most gracious and generous people you could ever hope to meet.

There was Paul... He volunteered his computer knowledge. IBM donated a couple computers to us. We had a lot of older adults that needed help, myself included, and he patiently worked with us to get up and running. He was always so faithful and helpful. He was forever telling us that the highlight of his day was coming over to help people.

There was Jim... He was a book buddy for some kids at the elementary school. He read with them. He was known as Grandpa Jim... On our wall, there was picture of Jim reading with a group of kids, he had the biggest smile you could possibly imagine!

There was Marilyn... she was our book-keeper. She's had a career in banking and the whole community trusted her integrity. Every year we sold tickets at the Cannon Valley Fair, and Marilyn was the money handler. Everyone in town knew her and trusted her. The Fair was a lot of work, but Marilyn was committed, she loved it.

We had hundreds of volunteers, and we celebrated the simple fact that as we invest in the life of our community, it returned a life that was full of meaning and purpose.

The good news this morning is that the cross of Christ leads to meaningful and abundant life. As we bear a cross to love our neighbor, as we work in our jobs and fulfill the calling of our roles, we do not suffer for nothing; we suffering for things that are incredibly important and meaningful. We suffer for each other, for our families, for our faith, for our hope and for our love.

In this cross to love our neighbor we are God's hands, bringing into existence God's on-going creation, we are co-creators with God.

I wonder-- in the jobs and roles that God has called you into, what are you co-creating with God? How are you bringing God's purposes, God's new creation into existence? Amen.