

September 12, 2021

Lots of profound stuff in our gospel lesson... Today I'd like to focus on Jesus saying, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

One of the gifts of Lutheran theology is what we broadly call a theology of the cross. It's all about loving the neighbor, or bearing a cross to love our neighbor.

This idea is deeply embedded in Luther's writing. And it has been tremendously influential; in fact, it is directly why the word "vocation" refers to a job. You see the word "vocation" comes from the Latin word "vocare" and directly means "calling."

In a very real way, each and every one of us are "called" to do the jobs that we do, and in God's eyes every honorable work is a sacred calling.

And it's not only our jobs, but the various roles that we occupy. For instance, as a parent, as a husband or wife, or as a Grandparent! There are jobs that we do, and then there are also responsibilities that we fulfill. So, God directly calls us, and works through us, in the jobs and roles that we fulfill.

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 is my purpose? What is the great work of my life?

Let me be very personal, as I contemplate retirement, this is front and center for me... This is exactly what I'm wrestling with—when I retire, what am I going to do with my time? What kind of things am I going to do? These questions are very pertinent for me right now.

To some extent I feel a little like a high school graduate, wondering about the next chapter.... I have some ideas, but I'm not exactly sure... To be honest, I have a little anxiety about it.

And I have to say that I've been watching many of you who are retired, and paying attention to how you spend your time. And there are a lot of good role models here! Many of you are very involved in your families and communities. Many of you have side jobs, or volunteer work...

And many of you **share your loving, kind and gracious presence**, to everyone you encounter. And I can tell you that, because I experience it! We are a community of loving, kind and gracious people...

So, now, what am I going to do? As a person who was, quote / unquote "called" by God to go into ministry, what am I going to do now? Does this mean, I'm no longer called by God?

Certainly not, we all stand under God's call, each and every one of us. There is no distinction between my "calling" in the church and anyone else's... Whether it's farming, or teaching or being a business person... Being in ministry is no different than anyone else's sacred calling.

All summer long I've felt like I was at a cross roads. Living with the question of what should I be doing with my time... And I started to realize that what I was doing with my time was reading books on Leo Fender, Les Paul, Jimi Hendrix and

the Beatles... It's been a long time since I've read theology! The Spirit is leading and preparing me for a different future.

I also learned that Kris and I are going to grandparents, and that is a very sacred calling! That's one very precious little baby girl, she hasn't even been born yet, but she's already captured our hearts... Last week I ordered some little OshGosh overalls!

To live under God's calling doesn't mean things don't change, it means that we listen and pay attention to what God is doing in us and around us and through us. I felt called by God to go to St Olaf Lutheran church in Austin, I've felt called to be here at Cannon River and Cross of Christ... And now I'm feeling called in other directions.

I don't know exactly what it will look like. I don't know how it will unfold. But I have a big trust, that if I pick up my cross and follow Jesus, it will find me.

I'm sure I will be surprised, I'm sure I will be making sacrifices. It won't be about sliding through life, it will be about engagement, and presence. Being a loving, kind and gracious person...

I suspect it will include playing guitar, and probably with nerds like myself... And I suspect it will be filled with joy and heart ache, and everything in-between. Being in community with others, is always a blessing and a curse—that's life!

I imagine it will include spending time with the kids and the new granddaughter! And sure, some of that time will be absolutely joyful. And sure, some of that time will be hard work... My sister tells me all the time how physically exhausting it is to keep up with her grandchildren!

The good news today is that we receive by giving away. It's not about take, take, taking... It's about give, give, giving... We understand that in life, there is a suffering that comes when we pay the cost of loving our neighbor.

This theology of the cross is about the transformation of that cost, the suffering itself... Instead of denying suffering and death at any cost, we learn to integrate it, and allow it to teach and transform us. We learn that ultimately; it's in the giving that we receive; this is the true meaning of life...

In this way suffering never has the last word.

And believe me this is God's miracle... We know that neither death, nor life, nor anything in all creation can separate us from the love of God, and this is what gives us new, meaningful and eternal life.

And this is not hocus-pocus, magical Christianity, this is real! As real as you and me, and we can only say... Thanks be to God...

Amen.