

A sermon preached on September 5/6 at Eternal Love Evangelical Lutheran Church by Pastor Michael Johnson.

iWork

Well it is Labor Day weekend. And our theme today is appropriately iWork. Because our job is yet another facet of our lives of faith and worship. This is a fact that unfortunately is often lost in our compartmentalized society where there is the “Sunday Morning” me and the “At Work” me. And unfortunately the two versions often are opposites.

That is where the doctrine of vocation comes in. It’s something that has been written on by other churches countless times. But today is one of the special reasons you are blessed to hear the Word of God in a Lutheran church. Because, the doctrine of vocation is uniquely Lutheran.

The world Martin Luther lived in, in the 1500s, taught that not all jobs were created equally. Some earned you heaven quicker. So Luther became a monk and tortured his body to have the fast track to heaven. Yet, after God had worked faith in Luther through the gospel, Luther made the culture shaking declaration that no job was holier than another in terms of your salvation. Being a pastor or teacher doesn’t get you to heaven any more than working at K-C or being a stay at home parent. Rather, what you do with your life in job or whatever God has given you is all an expression of faith or fruits of faith.

This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in the book of Colossians chapter 3: **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”** Didn’t it just sound like Paul was preaching false teaching and saying we work hard in order to receive an inheritance? No, Paul is talking to Christians who are already receiving the inheritance of heaven by the grace of God. Knowing this, they are freed to praise the Lord with their work.

You can’t really serve properly in your “calling” without the knowledge that you have an almighty “Caller.” That is why our jobs have no impact on our salvation. Without faith, whether you’re a fireman or even the president, all the good you may do, the Bible says are filthy rags without faith. Yet, through faith, Paul says in Philippians, they are a **“fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”** So even as we take time this weekend to thank God for the chance to serve him, even through our work force, we see the importance of knowing and sharing God’s Word.

By nature, nothing we ever do pleases God or earns heaven because all we do is tainted by sin. There are thousands of people in the Appleton area alone in danger of going to hell because they think that “I try to be a good person” will be good enough. Perhaps you know the pull of the temptation that even in the slightest what you do helps earn that inheritance – after all nothing’s ever really free right? And we are cut to the bone when the prophet Isaiah declares **“all our righteous acts are but filthy rags”** when it comes to earning salvation.

Well, it is true. Nothing is ever free. Neither is your salvation. That is why God sent his Son. Blameless and holy. Jesus kept all of God's laws perfectly for us. Enduring the mockery and criticisms we saw in the second lesson. Salvation certainly wasn't free. It was paid for with Jesus' blood on the cross. And through faith in him, Paul says you **"receive an inheritance from the Lord."** We don't earn it, we simply receive it as a gift from the Lord. An inheritance isn't an iffy thing like the lottery either. God assures you the inheritance of heaven *is* yours through faith.

In thanks for all this, Paul says "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart." Especially on this Labor Day weekend, praise God at your job. Work with all your heart because this is the calling your heavenly Caller has given you. Work with all your heart because you're serving God, not men.

What does this look like though? At church we're sometimes great at showing you how to serve God here at church but not so good at equipping and encouraging you for your "9-5" Monday- Friday life. Does being a Christian employee mean finding a way to force Jesus into every conversation? Addressing this issue, Martin Luther once wrote that a Christian shoe-maker doesn't praise God by putting little crosses on his shoes. Rather, he praises God by making good shoes because God likes well made shoes. Likewise, if you are a business owner – treat your employees well, manage your resources responsibly, and strive to practice your business ethically because God loves sound, ethical business. Through faith when you work, you are praising God with your work.

There is no compartmentalizing a Christian's life. Likewise, at K-C, God isn't looking for you to find a secret way to hide a cross or Bible verse into a product – so that whenever a baby's diaper is changed, they're literally being touched by the Word of God. No praising God at work for some of you will be respectfully managing your workers. For others, it may be staying diligent on that assembly line.

The doctrine of vocation speaks comfort to those unsure at work. Perhaps things are slowed down at work and you don't feel you're doing enough to be praising God. Here too, God says you praise him by diligently doing the work you are given to do and listening to your supervisor's encouragement of patience. And maybe there are some here that may not find comfort in this doctrine or holiday because at first glance they question if it no longer applies to them since they are between jobs. As you search for a job and ask God to care for your family, trusting he will; you too are praising God.

As you see the needs God places around you and seek to fill them, you are praising God. For the spouse of that out of work person, you are answering God's call when you encourage and support your spouse. If you're a stay-at-home mom or dad; you are fulfilling your calling through your answering the calling cry of your child. Every spill you clean, owie you mend, and dirty diaper you change is worship to God. To some it may smell like just another stinky diaper, but God says even this loving act of a parent is a fragrant offering. For Jesus promises he will bless you on the last day saying: **"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."**

Children, when you do your homework this school year, you are praising God. When you help your brothers and sisters, you're serving God. All of you, as you function within your family you are living God's calling for you at that moment.

These are ways you live your calling and praise God. And as we saw last week in iServe, there are plenty of wonderful ways you answer God's calling here at church. When as an usher, you assist someone, God smiles. When you serve coffee, setup chairs, or many of the other opportunities there are here – you are offering God your thanks.

This is my opportunity to thank you as well for the gift of my vocation. As Luther discovered, being your pastor doesn't get me to heaven faster than you. But you give me a double blessing by allowing me to dedicate all my time to serving God and even being paid through your generous offerings. Thank you for that opportunity.

Work at whatever calling the Lord has put into your life. Work with all your heart because it is the Lord you are serving. The Lord who has assured you a free and eternal inheritance. Amen