

+ Various Texts + Give Thanks to the Lord Who Calls Us + Thanksgiving Eve + 25 November 2009 +

Giving Thanks for Our Callings in the Home – Ephesians 5:21-6:4

You hear the word “vocation” and I would guess you think of a job. You hear the word “calling” and perhaps you think of someone like a pastor who serves in the church. The fact is, every one of us has been called by the Lord to serve, not just here in church though. No, he calls each and every one of us to serve our neighbor out there in the wide world.

Who is that elusive “neighbor”? Every person God has seen fit to bless through the callings he has given to each of us in three basic areas—the home, the community, and the church. That neighbor could be the person next door, the customer of your business, the child under your care, or the sibling in Christ with you here. Basically God blesses your neighbor, whoever that is and wherever they might be, through you. At the same time, you serve the Lord when you faithfully carry out those God-given callings.

Think about it. You wouldn't be here if the Lord had not used the callings of others to get you here, whether the parents who raised or raise you, the pastor who shared the Gospel with you, the factory workers who built your vehicle, or the farmers who produced the food you ate for supper. God uses all these callings to bless us and all our callings to bless others.

So why talk about them tonight? It should be obvious. The Lord in his grace could use miracles, but normally he uses our vocations to provide blessing to us and others. As we gather to give thanks for those countless blessings, we ought to also give thanks for God's blessings of our vocations.

The most basic of all those vocations is found in the home—the family. Every one of us has been called into a family. Now our callings in that family may change from child and sibling to spouse or grandparent or extended family, but we're still blessed by being part of a family. In fact, the Lord uses the family to provide the basic building block that gives structure to society and even provides the basis for our callings as citizens and workers. God cares very much about the family. If he didn't, he wouldn't devote so many verses and so many chapters throughout his Word to the family.

Within the family, we have the blessed gift of marriage. St. Paul lifts up marriage as a beautiful illustration of the intimate union Christ has with his Church—Christ with his servant-leadership willing to sacrifice it all out of love for his bride, and the Church willingly submitting out of respect for Christ's headship. Struggle and strife and pain can come when marriage isn't seen this way, but by God's grace through marriage, God provides countless blessings to husband and wife. He provides loving companionship without comparison, sexual happiness that is only allowable in the intimate union of husband and wife, and children.

Yes, children are a blessing and the family is a blessing to them. Through the family, God cares for children as parents are called to be the source of his blessing, even when diapers need to be changed, flu bugs attack, shoes need to be bought, or kids go off to college. Parents, especially fathers, are also called to train their children in the ways of the Lord, so they know about their Savior, starting when parents bring them to Baptism.

Children have a holy calling too. They are to obey their parents as if they were obeying the Lord himself, which really they are. As all the family members, then, carry out their God-given callings within the family, they are to do it in Christ-like love by which God blesses the family and society. All this is possible because God values the family, even putting himself into a family when Jesus became a son. May our gracious Lord then continue to bless you through your callings in the home, for which we give thanks!

Giving Thanks for Our Callings in the Community – Jeremiah 29:4-7

Why in the world would the Lord give such a command to his exiled people? They were strangers living in a strange land where they spoke a strange language. How could God command them to settle down there?

Yes, they were exiles. They were in the world, but not of it, but God was not calling them to be hermits out in the desert or to hide away behind locked doors. No, the Lord was calling them to put his love into action—a tall order considering their “neighbors” in the community had been their enemies.

You and I are “strangers in a strange land” on a pilgrimage to our heavenly home. Like those Jews, we're not home yet either, and like them, God does not call us to lock ourselves away in a monastery, live alone out in the wilderness, or simply avoid the community around us by holing ourselves up in the church like some fortress of solitude.

No, the Lord calls each of us to ***“seek the peace and prosperity of the city...”***, to ***“pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*** So how does that play out in our daily lives? How does the Lord

use us to bless the community around us? There are two basic areas where most, if not all, of us are called to serve—as workers and as citizens.

Work has been a gift from the Lord from the beginning. Adam was called to tend the Garden of Eden until he and his wife, Eve, fell into sin. Then work became a struggle, toil, labor, but since that time, the Lord has used vocations of work to benefit every one of us, whether it's using our own work to provide products or services to customers who need them or using our employment to provide income for us and our families or other ways.

When we faithfully carry out our calling as employee or employer, the Lord provides countless blessings, which we often don't think about—like how the bread on our table got there. At the same time, God's hand of blessing is often most evident when work is faithfully carried out. The Lord commends faithful work, even taking on the vocation of carpenter before his ministry began. No legal, God-pleasing job is excluded from his use to bless us and others. Whether it's the dairy farmer or the tech guru, God uses them all.

Every one of us is also a citizen. God commands us to show honor and respect for the governing authorities, submitting to their will unless commanded to sin against him. We do this by obeying the laws, paying taxes, and even praying for those in positions of government whether on the town board or in the White House. Jesus himself paid taxes to Caesar, and through his apostles Paul and Peter, he commands us to faithfully serve.

God blesses us through the local, state, and federal government as he provides blessings like paved roads, military protection, and various freedoms. At the same time, in our governmental system, the Lord also provides us with the blessing and responsibility of being active citizens in our nation. The Lord blesses a nation when its Christian citizens take an active role, not to legislate morality, but to stand up for what is God-pleasing. As worker or student, soldier or citizen, may our gracious Lord continue to bless you, and for those blessings we give grateful thanks!

Giving Thanks for Our Callings in the Church – 1 Peter 2:4-10

Did you hear it in there? ***“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*** The Greek word used there – *ekklesia* – was a word used when citizens of a town “called out” of their homes for a town assembly. It was a word the early Christian church used to describe the church, because everyone there had been ***“called...out of darkness into [Christ's] wonderful light”***.

When it comes to our callings in the church, it's important that we keep that in mind. Christ has called us out of darkness through the wonderful light of his Gospel. His Holy Spirit worked through that good news of sins forgiven, death destroyed, and salvation won to create faith in our hearts, to bring sight to our sin-blinded eyes, and to free us from the captivity of sin—to call us out of darkness into the light of life through Christ. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, Christ called us out of slavery as he welcomed us into his holy family. Through the Holy Supper, Christ calls us back from the sins that plague us with the forgiveness found in his body and blood with bread and wine. When we get careless with our vocations or take them for granted or see them as drudgery, we need to hear the condemnation of God's Law and the good news of Christ's forgiveness to cleanse our hearts and motivate us to faithfully serve. But where does God provide those blessings of grace?

He pours out those blessings in the church through pastors called to proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity and to administer the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion as God intended. They are called into public service to shepherd God's flock and equip us to see our vocations as opportunities to serve the Lord by serving our neighbor. The Lord also pours out those blessings of grace through faithful teachers of Lutheran schools and Sunday Schools, so the Shepherd's little lambs are taught to follow him to eternal life.

The Lord also pours out those blessings through faithful, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, who provide models of service or encouragement, support, wisdom, and admonition from the Word of God when we need to hear it. It could be a preschooler reveling in the knowledge that Jesus loves me, a sister in Christ providing a loving shoulder for those who weep, or an elder providing admonition when we stray from Christ and his church.

The Lord pours out his blessings through our callings, not because we have earned or deserved them, but because he purchased us with his holy, precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death. It is that good news that called us out of darkness and it is that good news that we are called to share. What greater way could the Lord bless your neighbor—whether at home or in the community—than to use you to share the good news of Christ Jesus with them so they enjoy eternity in heaven with him and you forever! May our gracious Lord continue to bless you through the callings he has given you, and for those blessings we give grateful thanks!