

**+ Colossians 3:12-4:1 + Who Do You Work For? + Series: What Does This Mean?  
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +  
+ 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 3 September 2017**

“Who do you work for?” That’s an interesting question, isn’t it? For some, that question is tough to answer because they’re out of work. For many of you, the answer comes immediately. “I work for so-and-so.” For others, you might answer, “Well, before I retired, I worked for so-and-so.” For those of you too young for a job, you might say, “Do I work for Mom and Dad?”

Who do you work for? That interesting question impacts every one of us. You see, no matter how young or old, how active or not you might be, every Christian works for somebody. But who? Who do you work for? This morning the Apostle Paul has the answer, but it’s much more than a job.

You see, Paul was writing to a group of people much like us. There were husbands and wives, widows and widowers, and unmarried folks. There were moms and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, young and old. There were slaves and masters. Yes, Paul lived during a time when slavery was a reality in Roman society, but not like the kind once seen in the American South. There were retirees and those without work. Colossae was even a little like Syracuse. It had once been a great city on a major trading route, but by the time Paul wrote this letter, the city had diminished to a market town surpassed in importance by much larger neighboring cities.

To those people like us, Paul had a lot to say about service and knowing who you work for, but only a couple verses actually talk about business. So what kind of work, what kind of service is Paul talking about here? He’s talking about what we call “vocation” or “callings.” Every one of us has vocations or callings given by God to serve our neighbor. In Confirmation Class, we define our “neighbor” as *“anyone whom God puts in my path to serve,”* like we heard in the parable of the Good Samaritan. So as a spouse, parent, child, sibling, employer, employee, church member, or pastor serving that neighbor, God uses you to bless them through your common, ordinary, faithful service.

Yet before Paul gets into specifics, he wants you to remember who you are. Now Paul is not urging you to remember your name or where you come from or who your family is. Instead he reminds us that we are **“God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved...”** You are God’s chosen people. Purely because of his undeserved love, God chose you to be his own son or daughter. You are now holy and dearly loved. Why? Because you’ve been covered in the holy blood of Christ who has forgiven all your sins.

Remembering your identity in Christ impacts all your attitudes and actions towards those whom God puts in your path. **“Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”** As God’s chosen, holy, and beloved people, we daily put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, a willingness to put up with the faults of others, forgiveness, and love. We reflect the same compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving love that Christ showed us when he lived in our place 2,000 years ago.

...But we don’t just remember who we are. We remember what we have. You have the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ. In his undeserved love, God brought us together as the body of Christ united by the peace Jesus won for us on the cross. That becomes ours through the Word of Christ as we let that Word **“dwell richly”** in our hearts through study and worship.

Now as you carry out your God-given callings, remembering who you are and what you have leads to the final reminder—remember whom you serve. **“You serve the Lord Christ.”** Now that puts a different spin on the question, “Who do you work for?” Sometimes you and I forget that.

When you consider how God has called you to serve him, Paul’s words can be awfully troubling. **“Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”** Has every word, every action, every thought flowed from grateful thanks to Jesus? Are people always able to tell you’re one of God’s chosen, holy, beloved people by the words you speak or the actions you do?

Paul explains how God wants that to play out in marriage. **“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don’t be bitter towards them.”** Wives, that word **“submit”** seems offensive, doesn’t it? No one’s going to make you **“submit”** to anyone! Yet neither Paul nor

God is forcing anyone to do anything here. Instead, he's reminding wives to willingly serve in their God-given calling as supportive helpers to their husbands, who have their own calling. A husband is never to be lord or master over the marriage, but the loving, self-sacrificing leader, whose love is to reflect the gentle, compassionate, self-sacrificing love of Christ for his Church. God intends the head and helper relationship to look like a beautiful ballroom dance twirling through life. But husbands, how often have you forgotten your calling as loving leader of the family? Wives, how often have you forgotten your calling as supportive helper of your husband? When you both forget who you work for, what happens?

It's no better in the family. ***"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged."*** Kids, when your mom or dad tell you to clean your room or do your homework or stop fighting with your sibling, how often do you happily and willingly listen to them? How often do you forget that you serve Jesus when you listen to your parents? Parents, how often have you let your kids get whatever they want or disciplined them too harshly? Dads, how much of a role have you taken not only in the discipline of your kids, but in their spiritual growth? Parents, how often have you forgotten who you work for and failed to set a proper example for your kids or grumbled about the holy calling in which God has placed you?

We see it in the workplace too. Yes, Paul is talking to slaves and masters in our text, but what he has to say also applies in principle to employees and employers. Employees, how often have you forgotten whom you really serve and slacked off when the boss wasn't watching or grumbled about the work you had to do? Employers, have you always been fair to your employees? What about other holy callings? Maybe you're single or a retiree or a church member or a citizen. How often do we forget whom we serve in those callings?

So often you and I are convinced we know who we work for, but it isn't God. No, we get fooled into thinking we work for ourselves. It's all about me. It's all about you. It's all about how I want to lead in marriage, what I want to do, what I want for the church, or how much I want to work. You and I are so naturally drawn to thinking about ourselves and putting ourselves first that we forget whom we actually serve. Such self-centeredness leads to ugliness in a marriage, miscommunication in a family, poor effort in the workplace, and half-hearted service in the church. When it's all about you or me, God gets pushed out of the picture and we're left isolated with guilt and headed for death.

***"Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*** Those words condemn our hearts when we look at them through the lens of vocation, but those words also remind us there was One who never forgot whom he served. There was One who never forgot why he was here. There was One who never grumbled about the holy callings he had—no matter how ordinary, boring, or difficult. There was One who served perfectly as son in the home and brother in the family, as citizen and teacher in the community, as member in the synagogue, and as Savior on the cross. That One was our Lord Jesus.

Like us, he had holy callings from little on. Remember that Jesus was ***"born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under the law..."*** (Galatians 4:4) Remember that Jesus had the highest calling—that of Savior of the world—which was lined out for him through 39 books of the Old Testament. That calling included lowliness, humility, poverty, suffering, pain, sorrow, shame, and finally death by crucifixion. Yet never once did he regret or grumble or shy away from serving no matter how ordinary, common, or difficult it might be.

From his conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin to his lowly birth in a stable to his innocent death on a cross to his triumphant victory over death, Jesus never forgot who he worked for. He served his heavenly Father by serving us—his undeserving, self-centered enemies. All along Jesus knew why he was serving—to bring you life and peace and forgiveness for all those times when you've failed at your holy callings, to place his holy name on you so your service would please our holy God. Jesus is the One for whom we give thanks to God, and through whom we can look forward to eternal life.

When you realize you work for Jesus and realize he has placed his holy name on you as his dear child, it changes everything. If Christ's name is placed on all your service, on every word and every action, that changes everything in your marriage, your family, your workplace, your community, and your church. That changes your attitude about serving, as Paul writes, ***"Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ."***

Jesus helps you give thanks in all things as a supportive helper or loving leader in marriage, as a caring parent or obedient child or loving sibling in the family, as a faithful employee or fair employer or model retiree, as a loyal

citizen and a self-sacrificing church member, as a contented child of God. He helps you give thanks for all things—the roof over your head, the clothes on your back, the food on your table, the money in your account, the opportunity to serve your neighbor, the good news of Jesus to share—all because he has graciously given them to you. Jesus helps you see that service to your neighbor—that ordinary, everyday service—is precious service to him.

Through the faith created in your heart at baptism and through the Word of God, you know who you work for whatever your holy calling might be. ***“You serve the Lord Christ.”*** That means your ordinary service as a parent, a spouse, a child, a student, an employee, a church member is something far more precious and important than you realize. You serve Jesus—and he blesses all your neighbors through your service. What a responsibility! What a privilege! What a joy to serve all those souls whom Christ puts in our path! Amen.