

Session #7: – *Vocation, Part 1*

Read: Chapter 5, pp. 123-139
(note: this is only the first half of the chapter)

Introduction

Throughout the Church, many lament the difficulty of connecting what happens on Sunday morning with what happens the rest of the week. The Lutheran view of what is happening on Sunday is quite different from the views of other Christians. Is the Lutheran view of the rest of the week different, too?

Opening Prayer – Collect 194 (LSB 311)

Heavenly Father, grant Your mercy and grace to Your people in their many and various callings. Give them patience, and strengthen them in their Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to their neighbor in Christ's name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Opening Hymn – LSB 856: O Christ, Who Called the Twelve



The Garden of Eden
Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1530
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Scripture – 1 Timothy 4:1-6

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know

the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

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Quotes and Questions from Veith:

“Luther’s doctrine of vocation may be one of his most original contributions to understanding the spiritual life. If he is critical of mystical ascents to the divine, insisting instead that God descends to the sinner in the Means of Grace, Luther goes on to lay the groundwork for what might be called a mysticism of ordinary life. If he denies that salvation is a result of our good works, insisting that forgiveness is a free gift, Luther’s doctrine of vocation gives good works a very different spiritual significance. If he sometimes minimizes human beings as radically sinful and limited, in his doctrine of vocation, he exalts human beings to a startling degree. In the doctrine of vocation, spirituality is brought down to earth to transfigure our practical, everyday lives.” (124)

- In what ways does the church in general tend to de-value everyday life? Does this church do those things, perhaps in unintentional ways?
- Who created work? Did it exist before the Fall? How has sin affected it?

“In both His spiritual and His earthly kingdoms, God is active, and He works through means. In the spiritual realm, He works, as we have seen, through the Word and Sacraments. In the earthly realm, He works through *vocation*.” (126, emphasis added)

- What examples does Veith give of this Godly work through vocation?
- Think of your “day job”: in what way does God work through it? What Biblical instruction or command are you already helping to fulfill “from 9 to 5”?

“Thus, God is graciously at work, caring for the human race through the work of other human beings. Behind the care we have received from our parents, the education we received from our teachers, the benefits we receive from our spouse, our employers, and our government, lurks God Himself, bestowing His blessings.

“The picture is of a vast, complex network of human beings with different talents and abilities. Each serves the other. Each is served by the others...our proper human condition, once again, is *dependence*.” (129, emphasis added)

“Our vocations are multiple, and they exist in four distinct realms, what Luther called ‘estates.’

- (1) The most fundamental estate in God’s design is the family. . .we also have callings in the workplace. Though this is what we usually think of when we hear the word *vocation*, Luther lumped it together with the family, as what people do to make a living for themselves and their families... (131-132)
- (2) God has also called us to be citizens... (132)
- (3) Christians are part of another God-formed estate: the Church... (132)
- (4) Luther speaks of a fourth estate...an overarching realm in which people from all callings and stations in life interact and come together... ‘the common order of Christian love.’” (133)

- Take a moment to write out your various vocations according to these “estates”:

- How does it change your outlook on these roles/activities when you see them as part of God’s calling or vocation in your life?

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“The Christian’s relationship to God is based on sheer grace and forgiveness on God’s part; the Christian’s relationship to other people, however, is to be based on love put into action. As Wingren puts it, ‘God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.’” (134)

- How does God’s external, objective justification free us to more fully and richly serve our neighbor?
- What implications does this have for our ethics and decision making (e.g. – the dilemma of a Nazi asking if you are harboring any Jews)?

“Indeed, just as God is hidden in vocation, Christ himself is hidden in our neighbor... It turns out, we serve Christ after all, but we do so by serving our neighbors.” (136)

“[Example of selfish unloving boss still providing jobs and income to employees.] Our own sinful inclinations remain, but they do not necessarily thwart the work of God.” (138)

- Consider the last two quotes – what strikes you about these two statements?
- In the end, who is working through *vocation*?

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Connections with Small Catechism:

Read and discuss **Daily Prayer** and the **Table of Duties**.

Daily Prayer

How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening:

1 Morning Prayer.

In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

*In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

3 Asking a Blessing

The children and servants shall go to the table with folded hands and reverently, and say:

The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord; and Thou givest them their meat in due season; Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Note: To satisfy the desire means that all animals receive so much to eat that they are on this account joyful and of good cheer; for care and avarice hinder such satisfaction.

Then the Lord's Prayer, and the prayer here following:

*Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless us and these Thy gifts, which we take from Thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.*

2 Evening Prayer.

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

*In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

4 Returning Thanks

Likewise also after the meal they shall reverently and with folded hands say:

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. He giveth food to all flesh; He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse; He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.

Then the Lord's Prayer and the prayer here following:

We thank Thee, Lord God, Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Thy benefits, who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

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Table of Duties

Certain passages of Scripture for various Holy Orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities:

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| 1 For Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers.
1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6 | 7 For Parents.
Ephesians 6:4 |
| 2 What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastors.
1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6;
1 Timothy 5:17-18; Hebrews 13:17 | 8 For Children.
Ephesians 6:1-3 |
| 3 Concerning Civil Government.
Romans 13:1-4 | 9 For Male and Female Servants, Hired Men,
and Laborers.
Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22 |
| 4 What Subjects Owe to the Magistrates.
Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1,5;
1 Timothy 2:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13 | 10 For Masters and Mistresses.
Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1 |
| 5 For Husbands.
1 Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:9 | 11 For Young Persons in General.
1 Peter 5:5-6. |
| 6 For Wives.
1 Peter 3:6; Ephesians 5:22 | 12 For Widows.
1 Timothy 5:5-6. |
| | 13 For All in Common.
Romans 13:8; 1 Timothy 2:1-2 |

*Let each his lesson learn with care,
And all the household well shall fare*

(Source: <https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/>)

Conclusion

Sunday morning is primarily an opportunity for God's people to receive God's gifts. The rest of the week (and really, Sunday, too) are an opportunity for God's people to share his gifts. Luther used the terminology of *vocation* – terminology previously only applied to priests, monks, and nuns – to describe the daily of the believer. Preparing food, changing diapers, going to work, serving as governmental officials – all of these were now considered callings from God to do his holy work in and among all aspects of human society. Thus we see that Christ has not only granted us new life, but has provided deep and abiding meaning and purpose to our time here on earth. For the believer, it truly is the case that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Closing Prayer