

**Vocation Sunday, September 8, 2019**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **Vocation: God Calling Us**

Mark 6:1-3

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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In His hometown, as Jesus taught in the synagogue, the crowd said in astonishment: "WHERE DID HE GET ALL THIS? WHAT'S THIS WISDOM HE'S BEEN GIVEN? HOW CAN HIS HANDS DO SUCH MIRACLES? ISN'T HE THE CARPENTER, THE SON OF MARY AND BROTHER OF JAMES AND JOSEPH AND JUDAS AND SIMON? AND ARE NOT HIS SISTERS HERE WITH US?" (vv 2-3).

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You've all probably heard the story about the time a cell phone rang in the middle of a sermon. I'm sure it's happened more than once, though I don't think it's happened to me. This is how it goes: the cell phone rings, and the pastor stops the sermon. He looks in the direction of the person frantically trying to find his phone and silence the ringer. Then he says, "That had better be God calling!"

We chuckle at the thought of God calling on a cell phone. That's not how He speaks to us. What God has to say, He tells us in His word. Our Lutheran Confessions put it like this: "God doesn't want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and Sacraments."<sup>i</sup> What this means is that you'll never learn something about God from a cell phone call that isn't already there in the Bible. And the same goes for the internet, TV, books, personal conversations, dreams, signs, feelings, or anything else. If it's about God and it's true, then it's true because it's biblical. And if it's about God but not in the Bible, then it's not from God and not true.

### I.

But there's another way that we *can* and *should* think of God calling.

*THROUGH HIS WORD, GOD CALLS YOU TO FAITH,  
BUT THROUGH YOUR NEIGHBOR HE CALLS YOU TO LOVE.*

I'll repeat that second part: Through your neighbor God calls you to love. That's what vocation is. Vocation means "calling" — God calling you to live in the world and with people, to do good works, to labor, to use your hands, your minds, and your mouths to serve others.

Now I want to be clear about what I mean by “vocation.” On the one hand, Roman Catholics use “vocation” to mean church work or religious callings—being a priest or a member of an order. That’s *not* what Lutherans mean by vocation. On the other hand, the secular world uses “vocation” to mean your job. A *vocation*-al school trains a person for a particular kind of work or trade, and it has nothing at all to do with God. That’s not what we mean either. Vocation *is* God calling you, but it’s *not* God calling you to faith. It’s God calling you to your neighbor. It’s God calling you to use and exercise your faith. To put your faith to work in love for those around you.

So vocation is really about *who*, not *what*. It’s about relationships. It’s about people, not things. Near the end of today’s service, we’ll be placing our tools, our labor, and ourselves before God, and we’ll ask Him to make us, and the hours of our days, and all that we do holy. But it’s not about the tools. They’re just tools. And it’s not even about our work or the things we do. Work is good and necessary, and we’re made to work and should work, if we can, but we don’t work for work’s sake. If we make it about the tools or the work, then those will become our idols. That’s how you become a slave to your cell phone or a workaholic. That’s also how you ruin relationships and alienate family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

The tools and work are there to serve other people. For all the times and ways we’ve done something different with our tools or our work, let us repent! For using our energy and the hours of our days to serve ourselves rather than others, repent! Stop thinking about your tools and give more thought to the people you serve with them. Put a face on the other end of what you’re doing. If you make widgets, then picture the people who will use those widgets. You may never meet them, but they’re there. If you wash dishes or do laundry or sweep floors, do it so others can eat, dress, or live, or so you can eat, dress, and live for others, or both.

## II.

But we need to put a little more flesh on vocation. What better way to do that than through Jesus? We’re told that HE CAME TO HIS HOMETOWN (v 1), His fatherland. That would be Nazareth in Galilee. Isn’t that remarkable thing? When God became man and took on human flesh, He did it in a particular place and among particular people. He wasn’t a generic man. He wasn’t a man without a country. He had a HOMETOWN, and in that HOMETOWN was THE SYNAGOGUE where He learned God’s word ON THE SABBATH, sang psalms and hymns, confessed His faith, worshiped with other believers, and eventually BEGAN TO TEACH (v 2). And He had a genealogy and a family. “ISN’T THIS THE SON OF MARY AND BROTHER OF JAMES AND JOSEPH AND JUDAS AND SIMON? AND AREN’T HIS SISTERS HERE WITH US?” they asked (v 3). God the Father sent His Son to that place and to those people. He put Him in that

family and that community and that synagogue. And that's exactly where we find our vocations—in the relationships we have at home, in the community, and at church.

The Gospel of Mark tells us almost nothing about what Jesus did for the first thirty years of His life. The other Gospels tell us a little bit, but not much. So what was Jesus doing *before* He was baptized for sinners and took their sins to His cross? “ISN'T THIS THE CARPENTER?” (v 3). That's how the neighbors knew Him. He's not just THE CARPENTER'S SON (Mt 13:55). He Himself is THE CARPENTER. By opportunity, training, experience, and skill, Jesus was a CARPENTER. For most of His life, He served His neighbors with chisel and mallet and plane and lathe. He made things. He repaired things. Maybe He even invented and improved things! Called by God to love His neighbors as Himself, He loved them in this way. Thank about it! Even the Son of God, when He became man, was busy and active, not lazy or idle. He belonged to the family of Joseph and Mary, to the town of Nazareth, to the local house of worship. Through those He relationships, He had His vocations just as we have ours.

So where and to whom has God called you? What relationships do you have? What family do you belong to? What community or communities are you a part of? In what church and with whom do you hear God's word? Through these people and these places, God is calling you—calling for your love and your time and your energy and your work. And how has He equipped and trained you to love them? What skills, talents, abilities, and interests has He given you? What needs do they have? Even if health, age, or other things limit you, can you pray for them? **WHATEVER YOU DO, IN WORD OR DEED, DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER THROUGH HIM** (Col 3:17). Ask, “What neighbor does this serve?”

### III.

By now you get the point—vocation is God calling you to serve and love others. We need to be reminded of this. But if you're like me, the reminder also has a dark side. It's in my vocations that I find not only my work but also my sin. I'm called to love but love so little. When I look at the specific neighbors that God has put in my life—my family, my community, my church—I see how just how much I've failed. How often have I closed my ears to His call? How often have I used my mind and my hands, my time and my energy, to serve myself rather than others? How many times have I turned the things I do or the tools I use to do them into idols, forgetting the people whom God would have me serve? God has called, but too often I've failed to answer, or stopped listening, or simply forgotten.

Dear friends, Jesus was a CARPENTER from Nazareth in Galilee, son of Mary, and part of the local synagogue, but He was also so much more. The people of His hometown had come to trust the work of His hands over the first thirty years of His life. That was just an invitation to trust Him with so much more. For thirty years He'd been preparing to work with a different piece of wood, to do a greater act of love, TO SERVE AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY (Mk 10:45). With wood and nails, this CARPENTER loved you fully and took your sin away. He took what your hands have done. He took all that's impure and unclean and sinful. And by His death, He makes you and all that you do forgiven. HOLY TO THE LORD. And now God calls you to believe it! Trust His word. Trust that your sin has all been washed away in baptism. Trust that His body and blood are truly given to you here for the forgiveness of sins. Trust that you are saved not by your vocations but by His vocation as Savior. HIS NAME is JESUS, FOR HE SAVES HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS (Matt 1:21).

And HIS DISCIPLES FOLLOWED HIM. They went with Him to His hometown. But doesn't that describe us? We are disciples of Jesus. He leads and we follow. And just where are we headed? As we hear His word and live in our vocations, we're going with Him to the land of His Father. He's taking us into His own country. He's leading us to the heavenly kingdom.

Like Jesus, you are *more* than your relationships. You're more than all the hats you wear during the day. You are a beloved child of God. You were made in His image. You are redeemed by His Son. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. And in your daily life, you are a mask of God. He uses you as an instrument of His love.

Remember the phone call during church? "That had better be God calling!" Then you look at the screen and see that it's your wife, or your friend, or your boss, or your child. But behind them it *is* your God, and He *is* calling you—even through them—to love and serve, even as He has called you to faith in Christ, forgiven all your sins, and promised you the life of the world to come.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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<sup>1</sup> Smalcald Articles III, VIII, 10, quoted from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Second Edition), p. 281.