

Sermon Series – Reformation 500 Themes

Vocation – The Priesthood of all Believers

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

¹For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' ⁵So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first last."

Theme: Workers who Fulfill their calling.

Until Reformation Sunday I am planning to preach on Reformation themes. I have been surprised each week of this month that every text and lent itself to an important Reformation theme. Today's Gospel lesson helped me out again because it speaks of our vocations or callings as Christians. Today I would like to look at workers who fulfill the callings that God gives to them.

I. Whom has God called to serve in His vineyard?

In our text the owner of the vineyard goes out several times during the day to find workers for his vineyard. This is the Gospel call when God calls us to faith in Christ, but notice that God calls them to do something. He sends them out to his vineyard to work. There is a painting in the City Church in Wittenberg, called "The Workers in the Vineyard." It features several of the leaders of the Reformation, who are tending the Lord's vineyard, but not all of them are pastors. For instance, the politicians are hauling manure. Of course, there are men whom God calls as pastors



of His Church, and men and women who serve in a variety of capacities. Every one of us even has some kind of gift in this congregation.

But the callings that God gives to us are not just in spiritual and churchly things. They are in every aspect of our lives. Husbands and wives have a calling. Parents have a calling. Children have a calling, Politicians have a calling. Workers of all kinds have a calling whether you are a cab driver, bookkeeper, factory worker, CEO, nurse, policeman, firefighter, soldier, fast food worker or anything. God has called each one of us to various vocations. None of them are more important or less important than another. In his work “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520) Martin Luther wrote, **“Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it - unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.”** That was a shocking insight at the time. People thought that monks and priests were the holiest people there were. Luther says that anyone entering the ministry must understand that their works are no holier than anyone else’s calling in life. This is sometimes called, “The priesthood of all believers.” We have all been called by God and given gifts to serve Him.

II. What has God called us to do?

The answer to that question is easy. We are called to serve our neighbor in love. Just before He went to the cross Jesus said, *“A new commandment I give to you. Love one another.”* St. Paul wrote, *“Serve one another in love.”* We are called to love and care for each other as God has loved us in Christ.

III. Now comes the big question, “But who is my neighbor?”

That is the question that prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. Whom was the Samaritan called to serve? It was the man who was half dead, who was lying in the road in front of him. God puts such opportunities for service in all of our lives. They begin in our families. He has given many of you a spouse. Your primary job is to be the best husband or wife that you can be. It is our number one calling in life. The next is to care for the children whom God has given to us, and to raise them in God’s Word, so that they know right from wrong and especially of God’s love for them in Christ. God calls children to something that is very difficult, to be obedient to your parents and to learn. He calls on children of all ages to respect our parents and to care for them when they get older. God gives us jobs and various vocations at those jobs. Some people are bosses. Others see themselves as the lowest person on the totem pole. We all have co-workers. Many of us have customers. What have we been called to do at that job? People have been called to do various things in our congregation. There are other civic groups that you might be a part of. Wherever the Lord puts us in life, there He calls us to love and serve our neighbor in some way. We have all been given some kind of task to serve in the Lord’s vineyard as we serve those around us.

IV. We all live by the Lord's grace and forgiveness as we serve too.

There are many ways that we fail. Sometimes we feel proud because we believe that our calling is more important than those of other people. Other times we feel like the people in our text, that we are worthy of more rewards than other people. It is very easy to focus on easy things that are far away and to forget the situations right here that need our attention. While hurricane and earthquake relief are good, it's easier to send a check to people in far away places than to help someone in need that God has placed in our path. There are also times when we feel that we are too important for the tasks that God has given to us or we will ridicule people who are doing things that seem like demeaning tasks. Luther once said about fathers changing diapers, **"Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.** (The Estate of Marriage 1522)

In the section of *the Small Catechism* on Confession when Luther tells us which sins to confess before God, he encourages us to consider our vocation and where we have failed. He writes, **"Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?"**

But our God is a God of grace. It is by grace alone, that we have even been called to work in our Lord's Vineyard. We consider our lives and see how we have failed to always love those whom God has placed in our path. On the other hand we see how God has even called unworthy servants like us. He has forgiven us, strengthened us, given us hope and peace, and blessed us so that he can even work through our weak, trembling hands. He has been generous to sinners like us by calling us to work for Him as we serve one another. He has found a way to make every one of our lives good and useful.

What the Reformation did was to break down the wall between the sacred and the secular. There is no distinction between sacred and secular work. Every relationship that we have is a calling and an opportunity to love and care for others and God has loved us in Christ. This is really the priesthood of all believers in which every kind of work is a sacred calling from God. May God make each of us faithful workers in His vineyard.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI
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