

“To Communicants”

Holy Thursday/Maundy Thursday, April 17th, 2014

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We have been journeying through a series on section 3 of *Luther’s Small Catechism* called “Table of Duties.” We had guest pastors during this 2014 Lenten pulpit exchange and I’ve come home from the congregations I visited -- over the last several Wednesday nights -- eager to ask my wife Traci, “So how did it go?” I’ve enjoyed my wife’s summaries to me. Her reports are pretty interesting. They have included giving me a sense of attendance, perceptions about the music, special comments made by the guest pastor, etc., but the most important aspect has been her evaluation of the sermons and one thing my wife looks for is a balance between Law and Gospel.

Often times there are assumptions made that if one is going to preach on the “Table of Duties,” then obviously there must be – as even sheer logic would seem to dictate – preponderance on law. After all the table of duties are about your vocations; *how you live* in this world whether you are a parent, a child, a worker, a student, an athlete, a musician, a citizen, etc. These are the roles and functions the Lord has given to each of us and we all have several vocations. In all of them, we must ***live out*** our faith. This implies action and action implies -- to the Christian anyway -- living in accord with God’s law. *How* does one live as a husband? *How* does one live as a wife? *How* does one live as a child? A student? A friend? The inherent task here invites a description of ***what you do...and what you do*** – *esp. if you do it in faith – will seek to honor God’s law in relation to whatever it is you’re doing.*

But I’d like to back up to challenge (somewhat) this assumption...which is not to say that it is all wrong, because indeed you must live out and act out your vocations, but...there is an unfortunate tendency in all of us to think in terms of the “God stuff” (that I’ll put in a box over here) and then the “me stuff” or the “my stuff” that I’ll put in another box over there. The “God stuff” box will include

my Bible, my worship attendance, and all of the things about faith...and when I'm feeling esp. inspired, I will take more time to pray; or think "God thoughts"...but for the rest of the time, we are going to live in the other box. The "me stuff" or "my stuff" box and for this box we don't really need the God stuff. The my stuff is everything else in this world and in my life...these are the things that are up to me; these are the things that require my energy, my attention, my time, my effort, my ingenuity. Just like when I carry out my vocations: these things depend on me and who can blame even the well meaning pastor when what ensues about such things is an emphasis on Law (well maybe you should blame the pastor since he's called to preach the Word of God accurately)!

But the God stuff and my stuff box division is all wrong. Know this clearly Christian: there is nothing you have and nothing you do that is not from God. And while this seems fairly simple to grasp intellectually, we have a way of forgetting it in the middle of our vocations. God enables you to breathe, God enables you to have faith; God has created your physical body; God has created your living spirit. The Word of God says, "In [God] we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28). That is our whole lives are permeated with grace (The Father giving good gifts motivated by love and mercy through His Son).

By grace you are saved through faith in Christ. By grace you have clothes on your back. By grace you have food. By grace you are enabled to put the food in your mouth, chew the food, and digest the food. But what is even more profound and amazing when it comes to vocation -- whatever you do in whatever role you have in life -- is that it is God Himself living and acting in and through you. When mom changes a diaper for her baby, God changes the diaper; when dad gets lunch for his kids, God gets lunch for His kids; when a teacher teaches, God is equipping the students; when a plumber fixes your water leak, God fixes your water leak.

Ezekiel once recorded God's message to His people which brings out this grace-orientation of our whole lives (when you hear "I" it is God speaking and describing what He will do): "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I

will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you...And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

God does it all. Christ is both our justification – the One upon whom God’s declaration of “righteous!” upon you is based – and Christ is our sanctification – the source of our lives set apart to God to live in His service and to His glory. Christ is the life of those truly living; Christ is *your* life!

But recall that I said I was going to challenge the over-emphasis on the Law “somewhat”...I made that qualification because the opening logic I shared with you about vocation isn’t all wrong. Even as God works in and through you, He includes you. This is the mystery even in holy vocation. So when you serve your family; yes, it is God who serves your family, but it is also – at the same time – you serving your family. The good works are God’s works and they are your works. Revelation states that – while we are not saved by our good works – these (your works) will follow you into glory (Revelation 14:13). Jesus in Matthew 25 judges all people with the words: “whatever *you did...*”.

So in a way we have a call to keep up with God. God works in and through us, and there is a part of us that absolutely delights in this. There is a part of us that rejoices to be His child. That part is the new creation part. But there is another part of us and that part of us is the old part, the part that has sin wrapped around its neck. This part fights against the work of God every step of the way and this is why we experience pain, drudgery, depression, boredom, restlessness, anger, resentment, fear, anxiety...all of these things flow out of our not wanting to keep up with God; all of these flow out of our resistance against walking with Him and through this resistance we grow weary, we grow tired, we grow discouraged...and sometimes – truth be told – we don’t even want to do it anymore. The flesh, the old sinful part of us doesn’t want to be a faithful pastor, or a faithful husband, or a faithful son, or a faithful daughter, or a faithful worker, or a faithful mother, or a faithful wife, or a faithful citizen, or a faithful student, or a faithful anything...this part of us leads us to know – frankly – the feeling of

exhaustion even while we continue to confess our true identities in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But again truth be told and as wonderful as our vocations are, our sinful nature views them as those things which drag us down. So it might surprise you that I've taken so long to get to the most important part of this sermon, but sometimes that's the way it is: There is one vocation you have that just might be the most important vocation of them all and that is the vocation which permits you to come the Lord's Supper as one who is sinful, one who is exhausted, one who is confused, one who feels empty, one who feels lost...as one who is feeling desperate, as one who is filled with shame; as one who bears the guilt of your sin – all the ways you've fought against God instead of keeping up with Him – God has created one vocation that permits you not so much to do as to receive. It is the reason why Jesus gave us His Holy Supper where we poor sinners – exhausted and beat up in our sin – could find a place to reconnect to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) and to be taken back to the truth: you bear your guilt no more. This is the one place where our Lord – our only source of strength and renewal in this desert – gives us His very body and very blood (where He conducts the miracle of His real presence...some people ask, "Why doesn't God perform miracles anymore?"...this is a misguided question...He does every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated right under the noses of humanity though many Christian confessions deny this to their great shame). This is where Jesus said you would find Him to do more than just keep you going, but to forgive your sin – your active resistance to keep up with Him in all your other vocations – and to strengthen you with His very life in you! But make no mistake for whom this Sacrament is for.

St. Ambrose said, "Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine." He was referring to the Lord's Supper (AC Article XXIV). Our Confessions continue to expound on the one for whom Christ instituted the Lord's Supper:

“For Christians who are of weak faith, diffident [unconfident], troubled, and heartily terrified because of the greatness and number of their sins, and think that in this their great impurity they are not worthy of this precious treasure and the benefits of Christ, and who feel and lament their weakness of faith, and from their hearts desire that they may serve God with stronger, more joyful faith and pure obedience, they are the truly worthy guests for whom this highly venerable Sacrament [and sacred feast] has been especially instituted and appointed; as Christ says, Matt. 11, 28: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Also Matt. 9, 12: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick.” Also [2 Cor. 12, 9]: “God’s strength is made perfect in weakness.” Also [Rom. 14, 1]: “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye [v. 3], for God hath received him.” “For whosoever believeth in the Son of God,” be it with a strong or with a weak faith, “has eternal life [John 3, 15].” (Solid Declaration, Article VII)

Rejoice in this vocation Christian...your vocation as a communicant. This is where the blood of Christ that covers all of your sin – which would otherwise impede your following Christ – is forgiven and in the eyes of God, forgotten! Now with this new grace you receive strength for all of your other vocations; the guarantee that Christ goes with you to conduct them. And this is where the very body of Christ becomes your anchor to God in this world...He is really with you – not in some theoretical way, but sacramentally, actually, truly – and with Christ you can face anything. God is with you. This is why during His week of passion our Lord instituted His Supper. He did not ever want you to think that He was somehow leaving you. Much to the contrary, this Supper means He has never been closer to you. Come and live in fulfillment of all of your vocations in Jesus by being once again a communicant who confesses the true body and true blood of Jesus given and received in the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins and for His guarantee that just when in exhaustion you have said, “I can’t keep up!” He comes and says, “I will keep up with you...why wouldn’t I? During the week of passion I suffered and died for you...there is nothing I wouldn’t do for you.”