

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”¹ Paul, as we heard, takes on the role that he needs to take in order to efficiently and successfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. When he’s trying to convert his Jewish sisters and brothers to follow Jesus as the Messiah, he acts and lives according to the Law of Moses *even though he, and all Christians*, is not bound to the Law. In a similar way, when he is dealing with Gentiles, Paul acts like Gentiles, putting aside concern about the Law of Moses and “little issues” like dietary restrictions and circumcision, for example. In this way, Paul hopes to be “all things to all people.” And why does Paul do this? In order that “*some* might be saved.” [Emphasis added].

In these words from Paul, we can find all sorts of good things. Were I preaching this text to a group of pastors and preachers, I might opt to speak about the need for we called to ordained ministry to be much more flexible, without breaking, of course, in how we share the Good News, approach the task of evangelism and outreach, structure our worship and liturgy, and so on. But this morning, as we gather to celebrate an important anniversary in our congregation’s life, it may be wise to speak more directly to the vast majority of you present—the laity of the congregation. Now, I’m sure these words apply to pastors and preachers, too, but today, I pray that you can honestly say, “Pastor was speaking to me this morning.”

Rick Warren, the pastor of megachurch Saddleback Church in California and author of, among other books, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, has made a ton of money selling books, tapes, and seminars that are part pop theology and part self-help guide. I’m not a big fan of Pastor Warren’s work, because it is focused way too much on what “we” do, and not on how God works in us. Unfortunately, *The Purpose-Driven Life* has gotten so popular that even good Lutheran friends of mine have jumped on the bandwagon and made it a part of their church programs.

My friends, in the words of the Apostle this morning, you have heard the *real* description of the “purpose-driven life.” Paul is quite clear. If we are to live a live in the image of Christ, as true sons and daughters of God, we should endeavor to become “all things to all people, so that *some* might be saved.” Unfortunately, the challenge we have in the 21st century hearing that message is to figure out if that means we should simply toss out the parts of the Bible, the Lutheran Confessions, and our theology that are not compatible with what others might think in order to proclaim a message of the Gospel that saves, or if we are called to be all things to all people only within the context of Scripture and our theology. Or, is there something in between—a way to

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:22b-23 (NRSV) <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=5986469>

be all things to all people without discarding the Scriptures in total or acting slavishly to them?

Paul is suggesting in these words to the Corinthians that there is indeed a middle ground. There is a way in which we, the faithful people of God and followers of Jesus Christ *can* be “all things to all people” while remaining faithful to the Scriptures and the witness to the sacred writings that come through things like the Lutheran Confessions, our theological understanding of what it means to be a Christian, and so on.

To be all things to all people is to live a “purpose-driven life.” But note that even Paul admits that while he places himself under the Law while talking and working with the Jews, he, as a Christian, is not bound to the Law. And when he is with Gentiles, he places himself outside the Law, not because he is exempt or out of disrespect, but because he is under Christ’s law, and not the Law as set forth to Moses and the Jewish people. Paul does these things in order that those within particular interest groups might be able to better hear the message of the gospel, and thereby be better enabled to receive the message of salvation which comes to all through Christ Jesus. If folks don’t accept the message after Paul presents it to them in a context applicable to their situation or worldview, then that’s *their* problem, not Paul’s.

This brings us to the topic at hand. What are we to do? How do we live Christ-like lives and follow in the example of Saint Paul? Unlike Pastor Warren’s approach to the purpose-driven life, it is not all about us and what we do. It is, as Paul clearly explains to the Corinthians, about what God does for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. If I have to take off my alb and stole and wear a t-shirt and jeans to be able to have a conversation about Christ’s love with a teenager, I’ll do that. What I am wearing has nothing to do about my love of God and God’s people. If it is necessary to use modern media techniques—projection screens, bill boards, direct mail, blimps, even podcasting—in order to reach folks with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, we need to do that. If it means offering worship services in Korean, English, Spanish, Chinese, or any other language in order to communicate the message of salvation which comes through Christ Jesus, then we need to do that. If it means we have to proclaim the Gospel to the world without using any words at all, and simply by our actions, then we need to do that, too.

Paul lived and demonstrated the purpose-driven life. It meant doing whatever it took in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Paul, and frankly for us, it doesn’t matter one iota if everyone who hears doesn’t grasp it at the same time. What matters is that everyone whom we can possibly reach has been exposed to the message and given every opportunity to respond to God’s call to believe, be baptized, and be saved.

When Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, he began by coming to the aid of people. He turned water into wine. He healed the sick and lame, cast out demons, and taught wherever and whenever he could. And, Jesus took his disciples with him, and as he taught them, they began to heal, preach, teach, and care for others as well. Jesus didn't stay in his hometown of Nazareth, but moved from town to town, village to village, proclaiming his message of repentance, healing the sick, and casting out demons. That was his purpose, and by that purpose he was driven.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have a purpose as well. Our purpose is not just to sit around meekly, wondering what will happen next. Our purpose is not to wring our hands and fret for the future. Our purpose is not...our purpose is not to speak in the negative, but in the positive.

Our purpose is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our purpose is to proclaim Christ crucified, yes, and Christ risen in victory over sin, death, and the devil. Our purpose is to make the love of God for all people known, not just in our little community, but in the neighboring towns, as well.

It's easy for us to say, "But everyone I know is a member of a church." That's fine. I don't know too many people either, who aren't members of a church. But I know a heck of a lot of folks are walking and driving past this building every Sunday morning, and they aren't on their way to church. I know there are folks whom we haven't met yet that are sitting at home right this very moment saying to themselves, "Is this all there is in life? Is there any real purpose for me?" We are called by the gospel—the law of Christ—to do whatever it takes, to be all things to all people, in order to proclaim the message of God's love.

And, as we proclaim that message of God's love to people, we have to be prepared to welcome those who hear that message and find their way into this very place. We have to be ready to welcome them with open arms, but not to smother them with excessive demands for their time or participation. We have to be ready to offer opportunities for service or study for those who are seeking those opportunities. We have to be ready to offer fellowship and friendship to those looking for that.

In worship, we have to be prepared to welcome all who come to the Lord's Table. Those who have been baptized must be received and welcomed just as they are, and invited to share in the common Meal of bread and wine which are the True Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have not been baptized need to be welcomed, prepared, and the baptized into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and then welcomed at this Table and into our community.,

If you have been seeking your purpose in life, you have already found it. It is doing exactly what God has called upon you to do since He called you by name and said, "You are mine!" No need to buy a book or attend a seminar to find your purpose in life. I'll give you a Bible for free.