

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

What does it mean to be called? All too often, folks hear the word “call” in the church and think only of those who are called to be servants of the church—deacons, elders, priests, pastors, bishops and the like. We have an image, an idea, of what the ideal called person looks and acts like. To be called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament is to be called to a holy vocation, and it certainly is a special calling.

Truth is, to be called to any vocation is a holy calling. At the time of the Reformation, the Latin word *vocatio*, from which we get the English word *vocation*, specifically meant a call to a church vocation—priest, monk, or nun, to be precise. Other folks might have had jobs or careers, but only the religious men and women had vocations.

However, Martin Luther, the great Reformer, turned this idea on its head, as he did to many things regarding the church and its teachings. Luther developed a deeper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit regarding call and vocation, and came to understand that every vocation and occupation was a God-given calling. Luther taught, and in this case, I agree with him 100 percent, that the calling of one to be a teacher, a parent, a student, a police officer, a soldier, a computer programmer, or any other vocation was just as much a calling from God by the power of the Holy Spirit as a calling to be a priest, monk, or nun. In fact, Luther went so far to actually say that the changing of a dirty diaper was a God-granted calling, because to change a diaper was to do something for another that he or she couldn't do for him or herself.

Luther also taught that, since all vocations are holy callings, we should do our utmost best at the calling we have. For example, if you are a student in school, then you are to do your best every day, every time, because at this moment in time, you have been called by God to be a student, and it is good and pleasing to God to see that you use the gifts you have received fully, and that by your being a good student you also bring honor, glory, and attention to God Almighty. So, my dear young sisters and brothers of the Augsburg Academy, as well as those of you older students as well, take note

that you are serving is a special and holy work, and God wants you to do your best!

Likewise, we all have our callings—even being a parent or grandparent is a holy calling. In living out our calling, we should do our very best all of the time, because in doing our best, we bring glory and honor to God, from whom our calling originates.

Sometimes, our calls lead us to unpleasant tasks—like those set before Isaiah in the second half of the Old Testament lesson this morning. Isaiah certainly wasn't excited about having to tell his own people that they were heading toward a lengthy period of exile and slavery, but that is what God called Isaiah to do.

Others, like Peter, James, and John, the call came upon reluctant ears. “Who, me be a disciple of you? I'm just a poor fisherman, Jesus of Nazareth. What do you want from me?” Of course, history and the Holy Scriptures tell us that Peter, faults and all, turned out to be a fairly good disciple and apostle upon whom Christ would build the church.

Paul, of course, comes from the other side of the aisle, so to speak. Rather than being one who heard the call to proclaim Christ to the world after hearing good things about the ministry of Jesus, Paul was called by Christ to leave the “dark side” of persecution. Paul would take his zeal and drive as a persecutor to become the greatest proponent of growth in the Christian community. He may have considered himself the least of the apostles, but his impact on the young Christian community was among, if not the, greatest of all apostles and disciples.

So, then, my dear brothers and sisters, how are you responding to God's call to you in your lives? Do you see your vocation as being a holy one? How has your work brought honor, glory, and focus upon our Father in heaven, who through the Holy Spirit has touched and empowered you and showered you with many gifts? Has your work, in fact, brought glory and honor to God, or have you claimed it all for yourself?

As you think about your calling, is it the same as your vocation? That is, are you really doing what you think God has called you to do? Are you using the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or are you setting those gifts aside to do other things?

This congregation has a calling, too. Oh yes, we are called, gathered, and sent into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we, as the gathered body of Christ, are called to our collective vocation as well. Called by Christ to live out the Great Commission, we are just like every other congregation—indeed, just like every other baptized child of God. But *how* we live out the Great Commission here is, and rightly should be, different than how it is done at St. Joseph's<sup>1</sup> or Emmanuel<sup>2</sup> or any other congregation.

We haven't talked about our congregational calling in a long time.

But to say that we don't have a calling, or that we aren't living out our calling, would be a lie. One of our callings as a congregation has been to the ministry of education. Through our work with the Augsburg Academy, we have taken steps to help raise a new generation of students who know not only their ABCs and 123s, but also, and I would argue more importantly, their Bible verses and the reality that they are children of God, and that God loves them and cares for them so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to be the Savior of the world. We might not think that this ministry is important, but it has made a positive impact on our congregation in just the two short years it has been in operation. Three families from the school have become members of our congregation so far, and I am certain that there will be more. We have grown from four to nine students, and with the commitment of our parents, staff, and you—the members of Abiding Presence—we will grow even larger for the next school year. Instead of our congregation fading into the woodwork, joining a long list of congregations listed as “Disbanded,” our congregation has taken affirmative steps to move forward and find new and exciting ways to minister to our community.

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Catholic Church in Beltsville

<sup>2</sup> United Methodist Church in Beltsville

And, that's not the only way we have reached out. Just this week, one member in our midst stepped forward and said, "Pastor, I read your report, and I've been thinking, why can't I be the one to take the lead for a high school youth group? I don't know a thing about being a high school youth leader, but we have enough kids who know a lot about being high school youth, and they have friends, too." I hope that person will follow the calling of the Holy Spirit.

We have an opportunity this summer to serve a number of families in our community, but we need to get our act together quickly. Parents are looking for summer programs for their children, and we have a building that will be empty from the middle of June to the middle of August. On my desk, at this very moment, are stacks of pre-planned Vacation Bible School programs just waiting to be opened and put into motion. Not just for a couple of hours each day, but to serve as the core to an all-day program where kids can come and play and learn and be safe while their parents are working. We already know how to run a day school program, so doing it in the summer can't be that much more difficult. What we need are a couple of volunteers to help in the planning of the program.

And, you adults, don't think that the education programs for you aren't here, too. On the bulletin board in the narthex you will find some sign up sheets for a couple of adult study programs. Sign up for your choice, and as soon as there are at least five registered, classes will begin. Possible times are listed on the sign up sheets, so there are options to meet about any schedule. And no, you don't have to be a member of the congregation to attend. Invite your friends, too!

My friends, every single one of us has a calling. Not everyone is called to be a preacher, a pastor, an evangelist, or a teacher. There are callings for police officers, fire fighters, homemakers, students, and even for retired folks! It is how we use these callings, these gifts of the Holy Spirit, which make all of the difference in the world. Thanks be to God!