

STEWARDSHIP

November 15, 2015

*Colossians 3:17: **"Take My Life and Let It Be"***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

An old cat was in the habit of catching all the mice in the barn. One day the mice met together in order to talk about the great harm that she was doing to them. Each one told of some plan by which they could outsmart the cat and stay alive.

“Do as I say,” said an old gray mouse that was thought to be very wise. “Hang a bell to the cat’s neck. Then, when we hear it ring, we shall know that she is coming, and can scamper out of her way.”

“Good! Good!” squeaked all the other mice, and one ran to get the bell. “Now which of you will hang this bell on the cat’s neck?” said the old gray mouse. Not a mouse dared to volunteer. Instead, they all scampered away back into their respective holes.

The behavior of these little mice reminds me of how the people of God often respond when there is work to be done in the church; especially, work that potentially demands much sacrifice. It’s a great idea, but no one is willing to do it. Better to leave it to someone else!

And then there are some who might serve because they like the respect and attention they get. Some might think to themselves: “If I do good things, then others will think I am a good person - a good Christian.” Or, others might like the honor and respect when people notice what great servants they are.

It isn’t natural for sinful human beings to be true servants in the Biblical sense. Luther once said that being a sinner means that you are “curved in on yourself.” Indeed! Even as Christians, we still carry around with us the sinful nature. The god of the sinful nature is also triune: “Me, Myself, and I!” And the sinful nature is very much concerned with questions such as these: “What’s in it for me?” “Is the return worth the risk?” “Is it really what I want to do?” “Must I give myself up?” And there are others we could add.

It says in our Gospel lesson for this morning, “. . . the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).” It’s a rather shocking statement don’t you think? God loves selfish sinners and sends his one and only Son to sacrifice everything for them. As it says in 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God loves you and me so much, despite the selfish sinners that we are, that He willingly chose to serve us by sending his Son to die on the cross so that we could be saved from our sinful selves and the punishment we deserve. Again, it says in our Gospel lesson: “Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many!”

The magnitude of the term “ransom” is really underappreciated. The word “ransom” involves the paying of money for someone. And what was the money that was used to purchase us from sin, death, and the power of the devil? Luther’s explanation of *The Second Article of the Creed* captures it well when he says of Jesus that He “has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won be from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and

with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

The words capture the seriousness of the ransom when they say, “precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” That was quite a price to pay in order to retrieve us from everlasting loss and make us his own. These are the words that typically stand out in this section of the *Small Catechism*. But did you happen to catch what it says after that? He make us his own that we may live under him in his kingdom. And then it says, “and serve Him.”

In Second Corinthians chapter five the apostle Paul writes: “. . .Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all . . . and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Did you hear what Paul says? Christ’s love compels us! We are nothing without the love of Jesus.

What happens to us when we have been loved by the everlasting love of Jesus? The result of God serving us is that we become His servants. But God doesn’t need anything from us since all things are “of Him, through Him, and in Him” as it says in Romans (11:36). So what does it really mean to serve God?

There are two thoughts that we want to understand here. First of all, to serve God is to embrace living in his love and accepting that it is the only way. Here our will becomes one with him in all that can be and we cry out for God to remove any ability on our part to say “no” to him. Secondly, to serve God is well defined by Luther when he says: “God doesn’t need your good works. But your neighbor does!” And it is here that we have entered into what is often called the Lutheran understanding of vocation. It means that God works through your daily work to serve others. It is here that we say, as we sung in the sermon hymn: “**Take My Life and Let it Be** Consecrated, Lord to Thee; Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.” And not just my life, but my hands, my voice, my silver and gold, my will, and my love - all of it “Ever, only, all for Thee!”

Faith grants to the Christian freedom from a slavish self-love, and freedom to love others secure in God’s love for us through Christ. Secure in the forgiveness of the cross, there is a reordering of our loves that sin has perverted. Love is redefined. We are brought back to God and his original intention for us, to live in his love forever. And, in the church, we find brothers and sisters - the family of God that lives by faith under the grace and headship of Jesus Christ. In the words of one Lutheran author:

[In the church] is where Christians show off, exhibit, and display their righteousness and holiness - here it is made manifest to all. In manifesting its righteousness and holiness, the Church shows off its Head and distributes His gift of holiness. This is Divine Service: the holy bride of Christ expressing her faith objectively in proclamation of the Gospel, as Christ taught it to His apostles, and in administration of His sacraments (Steven A. Hein, *The Christian Life Cross Or Glory?*, pg161).

What this means is that the service of all who believe in Jesus Christ is to call pastors to publically preach the Word in its truth and purity and administer the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ. **Take My Life And Let It Be!** When our life is touched by the righteousness and holiness of Jesus, who we are and all that we say and do becomes a continuous manifestation of Christ. As we uphold and support the means of grace, which is the way that Jesus is with us until the end of the age, the church is preserved and others are called to the Gospel. It really is an awesome service.

When we give of ourselves to uphold and support the means of grace through our time, talents, or treasure, it is true manifestation of Christ in our midst and a declaration to all unbelievers. It is the good work that Christ has done in us. Luther says, "Good works are works that flow from faith and flow from the joy of heart that has come to us because we have forgiveness of sins through Christ . . . God wants all of our works to be our own and not those of the taskmaster, of the Law, of death or hell or heaven. That is, we are not to do them merely because we love heaven, but because our spirit goes out freely in love of, and delight in, righteousness."

Indeed, we love and delight in the righteousness of Jesus. In his death we die to ourselves. In his life we live for him and for others. His service is the service that teaches all about service. His service is a pure love. He stoops down to do all that needs to be done to wash away our sins. And in his service to us we are taught to keep one another clean and to wash others. When you understand it that way, the ordinary work that we do in our lives and the work we do in the midst of the church is really extraordinary. It is all in the name of the Lord. It is his work in and through us. It declares Jesus! As Paul writes in our epistle lesson for this morning: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17)."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott