



Adult Education Winter 2018 – Marks of Maturity

CLASS 5 – FEBRUARY 18: VOCATION—THE IMPORTANCE OF CALLING

The old and honorable ideal of ‘vocation’ is simply that we each are called, by God, or by our gifts, or by our preference, to a kind of good work for which we are particularly fitted.

—Wendell Berry

I. What is a “Calling” or “Vocation”?

A. **Definition:** An occupation to which a person is specifically drawn or qualified. Also, the use of one’s gifts in their profession, family life, church and civic commitments for the sake of the greater good.

B. **Etymology:** From the Latin *vocatio*, meaning a “call” or “summons”

C. History and Usage

1. Pre-Reformational—Three Vocations (still so in Catholicism with one change)

a. **Ordained Life:** The Priesthood (Men only)

b. **Consecrated or Religious Life (Vow of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience):** Friar, Monk, Nun, Religious Sister

c. **Marriage:** Both men and women, for life, to one person

d. **Post Vatican II—Also Single Life:** Both men and women, a life of chastity

2. Lutheran Reformation (and later Calvin): *All* occupations are callings or vocations—the dignity of ordinary life

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardsticks or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tin that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying to you: “Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.

—Martin Luther

II. Two Key Theological Doctrines Ground Vocation

Every occupation has its own honor before God. Ordinary work is a divine vocation or calling. In our daily work, no matter how important or mundane we serve God by serving the neighbor and we also participate in God’s ongoing providence for the human race. — Luther

A. **Human Dignity:** All have dignity before God, being his image bearers (Gen. 1), and *all* work likewise has dignity. There is no hierarchy in vocations.

If you see there is a lack of hangmen, constables, judges, and you find that you are qualified, you should offer your services.

B. **Divine Providence:** God is at work in the world, and his instruments are His people. *God works in and through each of us as we carry out our vocations.*

C. **Grace and Works:** For Luther, we are saved by grace through faith, *for* works.

1. **This is Luther's Answer to the Antinomian Challenge:** It is an error to think our works earn us merit; rather, we participate in God's work through our work. We are "ennobled into mutual service in the fellowship of Christ" (Oliver O'Donovan).

If you find yourself in a work by which you accomplish something good for God, or the holy, or yourself, but not for your neighbor alone, then you should know that that work is not a good work. For each one ought to live, speak, act, hear, suffer, and die in love and service for another, even for one's enemies, a husband for his wife and children, a wife for her husband, children for their parents, servants for their masters, masters for their servants, rulers for their subjects, and subjects for their rulers, so that one's hand, mouth, eye, foot, heart, and desire is for others; these are Christian works, good in nature.

—Luther, Signs of Christ's Coming, and of the Last Day

2. **The Second of the two Great Commandments:** Vocation is service to neighbors (good works) It is the real outworking of the command to love one's neighbor. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.

3. **Response to Materialism:** Your economic activity is not to obtain possessions (although self sufficiency is important), but has a new meaning and orientation.

III. Areas of Calling/Vocation for Believers

A. **We are Called to the Church:** We play a part in our local congregation

B. **We are Called to be Citizens:** We obey laws, pay taxes, honor and pray for officials

C. **We are Called to Work:** God chooses our vocation, and our ordinary labors carry out his work in the world for neighbors

D. **We are Called to Family:** We have responsibilities to those closest to us

Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated; thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.
– Viktor Frankl